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ABSTRACT

This document contains papers from a 2-day meeting on identification, evaluation, and recognition of nonformal learning in the European Union. The following papers are included: "Identification, Assessment, and Recognition of Non-Formal Learning: European Tendencies" (Jens Bjornavold); "Why Measure Human Capital?" (Riel Miller); "Mobility and Social Cohesion" (Eric Fries Guggenheim); "Social Partners' Round Table--Is There Any Consensus on the Validation of Non-Formal Learning and If So, What?" (Eugenio Rosa, Mike Coles, Donald Kerr); "Work-Related Projects on New Methods of Skill Definition and Accreditation: Moves Towards a Personal Skills Medium in the USA and in Europe" (Barbara Jones, Kari Hadjivassiliou); "The Recognition and Validation of Informal Learning in France" (Anne-Marie Charraud); "Finnish Competence-Based Qualifications--Organization, Assessment, and Legitimacy" (Petri Haltia); "Accreditation of Non Formal Learning in the Netherlands" (Marian Nieskens, Ruud Klarus); "Examination of the Requirements for Successful Validation of Vocational

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Learning--The Issue of Legitimacy" (Jens Bjornavold); "A Few Features of the Situation in France--The Views of CFDT (Confederation Francaise Democratique du Travail) on the Measurement of Informally Acquired Competences" (Jose Danilo); and "Social Partners' Round-Table Discussion: the Validation of Prior Learning: What Can We Build Together?" (Juan Maria Memendez-Valdes, Hjordis Dalsgaard, Nikolaus Bley). A summary of the conference discussions concludes the document. Several papers contain substantial bibliographies. (MN)

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PANORAMA

AGORA V
Identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning

Thessaloniki, 15 and 16 March 1999

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AGORA V
Identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning

Thessaloniki,
15 and 16 March 1999

Cedefop Panorama series; 45

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Foreword

Agora V will deal with the issue identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. This topic has been widely discussed among politicians and elaborated by researchers during the last decade. Only a few countries, however, have attempted to introduce actual systems, but a growing number is considering doing so. We can also observe a certain activity on a European level, aiming at the introduction of supra-national initiatives in this area. It is fair to suggest that systems focusing on identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning will become integrated parts of the national (and perhaps the European?) systems of education and learning during the coming decade. CEDEFOP has addressed this issue during several years ([1]) in order to compare different national approaches as well as support initiatives on a European level. The present Agora is an effort to make a stage point to CEDEFOP investigation work, and to confront our outcomes to the judgement of social partners and policy makers, in order to carry on with our investigations on renewed bases. It will be an occasion, as well, gathering the different actors intervening in this field, policy makers, social partners, searchers, teachers and trainers, workers, trainees, ..., to try to transcend our differences, to make a common review of the situation, and to draw as consensual conclusions as possible regarding the measures to implement in the future.

The starting point of the Agora will be the discussion paper worked out by Jens Bjørnåvold in 1997, the three already published reports, and the number 12,1997/III, of the Vocational Training, European Journal. The experts participating to the Agora will the be invited to write on their own appreciation of the issue, in reaction to the previous documents. Those original productions, as well as the syntheses of the debates will be published before the end of the year 1999.

In continuation on this theme, Agora VI, 24-25 June, will treat of "Reporting on human capital resources in enterprises".

The reflection leaded along the last years allows us to notice the existence of a consensus, in our societies, on the utility of procedures of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning and on the necessity to bring them into play. On the other hand it leads to raise at least three main questions.

A consensus

Even the less qualified worker uses, in the course of the productive process, more know-how, intelligence and initiative than the word "unqualified" would let us believe. On the job, at work, but home too, in the family life and the leisure time people acquire and develop relevant economic and social competencies. This permanent improvement of competencies and

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([1]) Sea the list of CEDEFOP publications on that topic at the end of this paper.

knowledge makes people more productive and contributes to the development of their learning ability and of their transversal or generic competencies and knowledge. A system which acknowledges the real competencies of the individual, and not only the formal ones, is very likely to motivate this individual to go on developing his competencies. For the enterprise that means lower training costs and time saving, which on its turn has good chances to re-enforce the employer's motivation to accept and to contribute towards competencies development.

To assess, to validate and to accredit non-formal learning is then of a huge social importance. The validation and accreditation of non-formal experiences based learning has indeed several advantages both for the individual and for the community :

(a) it permits to identify hidden and/or sleeping competencies that could be put at work in the interest of the enterprise and of the society in general;

(b) it might increase the self esteem of the workers, and give them an incentive to put in motion more of their intelligence, ingenuity and industry, in their own interest, but at the same time in the interest of the enterprise and of the society as a whole ;

(c) it allows to save time in further education and training curricula by giving credit for the already mastered competencies and by permitting to spend more time learning the topics where inadequacies have to be made up;

(d) it eventually gives the opportunity of a second-chance education for people who missed their first one in the formal education and training system;

(e) ...

Three basic questions

(a) A question of methodologies: Is it possible to identify and "measure " non-formal learning in a proper way; do we run the risk of overlooking important aspects of the learning in question, - partly because this is a form of learning that is contextually bound and very heterogeneous, not easily delimited or standardised?

(b) A question of standards: When we assess and recognise non-formal learning, according to which standards? How are we going to decide what is good and bad learning, relevant and non relevant learning? Can we foresee different standards, -for example on different levels (European, national and sectorial); are existing national qualification standards appropriate in this setting or will the fact that they (mostly) have been developed in relation to the formal educational system, make assessment and recognition of non-formal learning more difficult?

(c) A question of values and legitimacy: If we have identified, assessed and recognised non-formal learning originating from work-places or leisure time activities, how will these competencies be treated by the labour market, the educational system and society in general? What's the relative value of learning taking place in a non-formal setting versus

the learning taking place in a formal setting? Will non-formal learning give the same rewards in terms of wages, promotion and access to education/training as learning within the formal systems?

Basically, the question of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning is a question of the interlink between various forms of learning and various contexts of learning. Can we improve the link between learning taking place in work and leisure time and learning taking place in schools? How can we create a more flexible system supporting learning throughout life that makes it possible to make use of existing experience and knowledge in a better way than what's the case today? And if we create such a system, what effect will this have on social reward mechanisms, wages, promotions, access to education/training and professional borderlines (in view of the fact that many professions are based on a strict definition of the competencies needed in order to be accepted; very often demanding a certain, predefined learning path....)?

In order to attempt to work out all that questions, we have the pleasure to invite you to join the CEDEFOP Fith Agora in Thessaloniki, on 15th-16th March 1999.

Cedefop publications on the issue of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning.

Bjørnavold, Jens. *Identification and validation of prior and informal learning: experiences, innovations and dilemmas*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997. (Cedefop Panorama series, 67).

Cedefop. *Identification, validation and accreditation of prior and informal learning: United Kingdom report*. Scottish Qualifications Authority – SQA. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1997. (Cedefop Panorama series, 70)

Cedefop. *Study on the upgrading and recognition of qualifications in the field of the restoration and rehabilitation of the architectural heritage : Summary report. National reports: Federal Republic of Germany; Belgium Dutch-speaking region; France; Italy; United Kingdom*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1994. (Cedefop Panorama series, 49).

Cedefop. What do we know? Measuring knowledge, skills and competences in the labour market. In: *European Journal Vocational Training*, No 12, September – December 1997. Available from Internet: http://www2. trainingvillage.gr/download/journal/bull-12/12-97-en.pdf [cited 6.6.2002]

Collingro, Peter; Heitmann, Günter; Schild, Hanjo. *Identifizierung, Bewertung und Anerkennung von früher und informell erworbenen Kenntnissen: Deutschland*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998. (Cedefop Panorama series, 72).

Feutrie, Michel. *Identification, validation et accréditation de l'apprentissage antérieur et informel: France*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998. (Cedefop Panorama series, 71

Perker, Henriette; Ward, Christine. Identification and accreditation of skills and knowledge acquired through life and work experience: comparative report of practice in France and the United Kingdom. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995. (Cedefop Panorama series, 44).

Agenda for the meeting

Monday, 15 March

09.00 Welcoming address and introduction : Johan van Rens, Director, Cedefop

I Taking stock of the validation of prior learning

09.15 The validation of prior learning in Europe: taking stock, Jens Bjørnåvold, Cedefop

09.45 Why measure human capital? Riel Miller, OECD

10.15 Mobility and social cohesion, Éric Fries Guggenheim, Cedefop

11.15 Round-table discussion among social partners:

The validation of prior learning: does consensus exist, and on what?

- Mike Coles, The Qualification and Curriculum Authority, England
- Donal Kerr, FAS, The Training and Employment Authority, Ireland
- Eugenio Rosa, Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses

12.00 General discussion on the present situation as regards the validation of prior learning

II Questions on methodology of validating vocational prior learning

15.00 Objective techniques for assessing prior learning and/or an reaching overall judgement

- Barbara Jones, The Manchester Metropolitan University and Kari Hadjivassiliou, The Tavistock Institute, London : The smart cards project
- Anne-Marie Charraud, Délégation Générale à l'Emploi et à la Formation Professionnelle : Enhancing the value of vocational prior learning in France

16.30 Validation and/or upgrading of vocational prior learning

- Petri Haltia, University of Turku : 'Finnish competence-based qualifications'
- Marian Nieskens, Centrum voor innovatie van opleidigen and Ruud Klarus, STOAS, The Netherlands: The Netherlands model for recognition of prior learning

17.30 General discussion on assessment methodologies

Tuesday, 16 March

III Questions on the conditions for the success of the validation of vocational prior learning

09.30 The question of legitimacy: Jens Bjørnåvold, Cedefop

10.00 The political, economic and social stakes in the validation of learning: José Danilo, Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail

10.30 Round-table discussion among social partners:

The validation of prior learning: what can we construct together?

- Nikolaus Bley, Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund - Bildungswerk
- Hjørdis Dalsgaard, Undervisningsministeriet, Denmark
- Juan Maria Menéndez-Valdés, Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales

11.30 General discussion

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1. Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning: European tendencies

Jens Bjørnåvold

1.1. Introduction

In 1994, according to Eurostat (1997), almost 25% of the entire European population was enrolled in some form of education and training (all levels included). The growth of specialised and institutionalised training is one of the most distinct characteristics of European societies of today. Against this background, growing interest in learning taking place outside the formal education and training domain may seem paradoxical. In a situation where national education and training systems face overcapacity and where highly educated people face unemployment, the sense in putting resources into systems of "assessment and recognition of informal and non-formal learning", may seem questionable. This is, however, what is happening. During the last decade, a majority of Member States in the EU, together with countries outside the EU, have initiated work to establish methodologies and institutions facilitating identification, assessment and recognition of learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions, what we call non-formal learning. ([2]) Pioneered by France (The Law on "Bilan de competence" from 1985 and the Law of 1992 on the "Validation of skills acquired by work experience"), attention on these issues has been strengthened year by year. The purpose of this article is to provide an updated picture as well as an interpretation of this tendency. ([3])

Already at the outset, it is possible to conclude that there is nothing like a common European approach. The fact that initiatives have been taken at different points of time and within the context of different systems of education and training, leaves us with a heterogeneous mix of national and sectoral approaches. What is important, is that most initiatives seem to focus on the same challenges. Firstly, the reorientation of formal (especially vocational) education and training, from strictly input-oriented to output-oriented systems is important in order to understand activities. In countries like the UK and Finland, it is emphasised that what matters is the competencies, not how you have acquired them. By accepting alternative pathways to learning, in addition to the ones provided within formal schemes, the question of assessment

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([2]) The term non-formal learning encompasses informal learning, which we can describe as unplanned learning in work situations and elsewhere, but also includes planned and explicit approaches to learning introduced in work organisations and elsewhere, not recognised within the formal education and training system.

([3]) Our presentation is based on material gathered within the framework of the CEDEFOP project on "Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning", initiated in 1997. A total of 15 studies have been commissioned to research institutions in 14 countries, and this article represents a first attempt to bring together the results of this work.

becomes a central one. Secondly, but linked to the above point, the growing emphasis on life-long learning implies a stronger focus on the link between different forms of learning in different areas at different stages of life. While the formal system is still very much focused on initial education and training, a lifelong learning system has to face the challenge of linking a variety of formal as well as non-formal learning areas. This is necessary to meet the individual need for continuous and varied renewal of knowledge and the enterprise's need for a broad array of knowledge and competencies - a sort of knowledge reservoir to face the unexpected.

More or less explicitly, these two challenges are emphasised in all the countries studied. Methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning are looked upon as necessary tools to open up these new pathways. The initial focus in our work on this issue was a methodological one; is it possible to measure learning taking place outside formal education and training in a reliable and valid way? Although still of crucial importance, the introduction of methodologies in this area can only be understood within a broader social and political context; as a response to changed conceptions of education and training. This defines our main perspective when trying to overview developments in the EU/EEA-context.

1.2. Taking stock ([4])

The European situation will be presented by looking at five country clusters. Even though countries within each cluster may differ somewhat in their methodological and institutional choices, geographical nearness as well as institutional closeness seem to motivate mutual learning. We start by discussing the role of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Germany and Austria. Two basic questions define the scope of this presentation: why have so few initiatives been taken in these countries, and how does the dual system of vocational education and training influence work and initiatives in this field. In the second cluster, the approaches of the Mediterranean countries Greece, Spain and Italy are discussed. These are countries where, due to weak vocational education and training traditions and systems, non-formal learning has played a crucial role. In a situation where formal education and training generally is being strengthened, the role of non-formal learning is challenged and changed. In the third cluster of countries, Finland, Norway, ([5]) Sweden and Denmark, we ask the question whether a Nordic model can be identified. The Nordic countries enjoy a long tradition of

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([4]) The overview presented in this article is limited in the sense that we basically focus on initiatives at national level. As will be documented in the forthcoming synthesis-report on the CEDEFOP-project on "Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning", important additional initiatives have been taken at the level of industry-sectors and branches, partly on an autonomous basis, partly supported by European programmes like Leonardo da Vinci and Adapt. In addition, and following the recommendations of the EU "White Paper" from 1995, "Towards a learning society", almost 20 projects have been supported to investigate the question of "automated", IT-based assessment, linked to the original idea of a personal skills card. Both tendencies point towards supra-national solutions, implying a certain degree of harmonisation of both instruments and standards.

([5]) Norway has been included as the only non-member of the European Union in this study.

mutual learning in the area of education and training; whether this applies to assessment and recognition of non-formal learning is another question. In the fourth cluster of countries, United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, we reflect on experiences within, as well as the influence of, the UK NVQ-system (National Vocational Qualifications). The NVQ-system has received much attention, not least from abroad. As a high-profile system emphasising modularization and output, the NVQ-system has, in spite of domestic criticism, become an important reference-point in the international debate. Ireland and the Netherlands can be looked upon as countries where this influence has been strong, especially in the field of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. The fifth cluster of countries, France and Belgium, is defined on the basis of geographical nearness rather than a common approach towards non-formal learning. As we have already indicated, the topic of non-formal learning has moved into the forefront of the French debate on education and training during the last decade. Both in legal and practical terms, the French experiences are important. Belgium differs very much from the French situation. Although some French influence may be traced, this is a country in a very early stage of this process.

Due to differences between different countries, the scope of the presentations, as well as the level of detail, differs somewhat. We try to cover three aspects. Firstly, what is the role of non-formal learning within the existing political-institutional context? Secondly, is it possible to identify methodological and/or institutional initiatives in this area, established on a permanent basis? Thirdly, is it possible to identify experiments, for example projects aiming at the development of methodologies or institutions for the assessment and recognition of non-formal learning?

1.2.1. Non-formal learning in the context of the dual system: Germany and Austria

In Germany and Austria, the issue of non-formal learning is a new and unresolved one. Five years ago, this issue was hardly discussed. Today, a debate on the role of non-formal learning is gradually evolving. A number of experimental projects (in particular focusing on the needs of the unemployed, people re-entering the labour market, etc.), have also been initiated, testing various approaches to assessment. So far, the longer-term political-institutional consequences of this debate and these experimental projects have been difficult to predict. We think, however, that these two countries, despite their reluctance, are interesting "learning cases", illustrating the possibilities and potential as well as obstacles and problems in this area.

A number of factors explain why the issue of non-formal learning has so far played a limited role in Germany and Austria.

(a) Direct demand for the assessment of non-formal learning has been low. The formal system of education and training is extensive and has for a long time covered substantial proportions of each age group. In this way we talk of a very strong education and training fundament, reducing the number of people likely to ask for recognition of non-formally based competencies.

(b) The education and training system is highly focused on initial education and training. Within the vocational field, the status of the dual system has been and still is very high. There is no tradition to follow other pathways to learning, especially outside the formal system.

(c) The fact that the dual system is based on a combination of school and work-based learning implies that the experiential part of learning is somehow included in the official model, reducing the need to assess non-formal learning acquired outside the formal system.

(d) The formal education and training system is based on "Berufsprofilen" (professional-vocational profiles), representing a clearly defined set of qualifications/competencies. Each "Berufsprofile" indicates what should be learned, how it should be learned and where this should take place. The profiles, which can be looked upon as the fundament, the standards or the benchmarks of the system, can to a certain degree be seen as "input-oriented". By defining the "correct" pathway to a certain qualification, they also exclude other pathways, for example, (partly) based on non-formal learning.

(e) The concept of "Beruf" (vocation), following a successful completion of formal education and training, does not only specify a certain training approach, but rather, it is linked to a certain wage level and a set of rules defining rights and responsibilities.

Together, all these factors contribute to the high value attributed to formal certificates from the formal system. Enterprises and branches have also been reluctant to consider other learning pathways because of high unemployment rates. The topic of non-formal learning has been (and still is), looked upon with indifference. This indifference also seems to be linked to the high complexity of the system, alternatives are difficult to conceive in a situation where all steps are planned and described in detail and where professional status as well as wage level depends on following these steps. But as indicated, a change of attitude is taking place, and a growing awareness of non-formal learning can be explained through the following elements:

(a) In both countries, but in particular in Germany, the existing education and training system is accused of being too focused on initial training. The rigidity and inflexibility following this bias makes the system badly animated to support continuous training/retraining, etc. The role of non-formal learning has been raised in this context as too strong a focus on initial training, running the risk of overlooking important learning taking place outside this limited field.

(b) In both countries, the development of the CVT system has not followed the highly structured and formalised model of initial training and education. On the contrary, this "sector" is heterogeneous and subject to limited public or tripartite coordination. This development has stressed the importance of alternative pathways to learning; the fact that the need for competencies cannot be entirely planned in advance, flexible learning models are prerequisites for successful learning.

(c) The lack of complementarity in initial and continuous training/education systems, stresses the need for "bridging" solutions, which, on the one hand, can utilise the growing

CVT system in a more systematic way, and, on the other, can link these elements to the existing initial training "colossus." Assessment methodologies, and institutions able to provide valid and reliable assessments of a wide range of competencies from different sources (formal as well as non-formal), are essential if this bridging function is to be developed and established.

Increased flexibility through modularization has been introduced as a key approach in this context. The main argument is that such a modularization would open up a better link between initial and continuing education and training. Candidates could enter and re-enter education and training according to their own needs and assessment and testing whould be limited to the modules in a more output-oriented way, leading to alternative paths to learning. Regine Görner, representative of DGB, stated in January 1999:

'Das Prüfungswesen wird sich entsprechend verändern müssen. Teilqualificationen sind jeweils im Berufsbildungspass zu zertifizieren. Die Abschlussprüfung wird dadurch erheblich entschlacht, sogar überflüssig.'

This statement emphasises the need for a more flexible education and training approach where different levels and learning pathways can be linked together in a better way than is the case today. The German and Austrian cases are important in order to understand the general context of non-formal learning. The starting point is not the methodologies, nor the questions of reliability and validity of measuring and assessing learning, but rather, the overall change in education and training needs, and moreover, change in education and training approaches. The dual system was not intended to be a lifelong learning instrument, but an initial training instrument. In a situation where retraining and renewal of competencies is emphasised, the weaknesses of this (in other respects very efficient), model appears. The questions are: how to open up the existing model; how to link to CVT, how to allow for a greater variety of pathways to the same qualifications and competencies. Such a shift demands systems for assessment and recognition of non-formal as well as formal learning.

In spite of a reluctance to embrace initiatives supporting assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, we find elements both in the German and the Austrian systems linked to this area. These arrangements illustrate that the issue of non-formal learning has been considered, but within a limited scope and framework. The "Externenprüfung" is perhaps the most important single element "bridging" non-formal and formal learning, and is a permanent element of both the German and the Austrian dual system. This test provides experienced workers with the right to take part in the final craftexamination (Absclussprüfung) together with those having followed the ordinary route through the dual system. Although important, the "Externenprüfung" only provides access to a test, it does not provide any independent or particular methodology aimed at the identification and assessment of the specific experiences. In this respect, the "Externenprüfung" is designed according to the content, principles and structure of the formal pathway. Said in another way, the competencies acquired outside the formal system, irrespective of how different they are from those produced in the formal system, have to be presented and restructured (by the candidate) according to the principles of

the formal system. This does not reduce the importance of the "Externenprüfung", approximately 5% of all examinations within the German system are annually based on it. The Austrian "Berufsreifeprüfung", introduced in 1997, can also be looked upon as a "bridging effort", in this case between the dual system and higher education. The same kind of system exists in Germany although it is rather limited as we talk of institutional elements linking various levels of the formal system.

As already indicated, we can observe a certain amount of experimentation in the area of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in the two countries. Especially in Germany, we find a number of limited project approaches touching upon the issue. It is worth noting that these projects are concentrated on the needs of specific groups (unemployed, women trying to re-enter employment, drop-outs from the formal system, etc.). It is also worth noting that several of these projects aim at improving the access of these groups to continuing vocational education and training, in some cases to make it possible for them to re-enter the initial training system. The project "Bildungspass-Qualifizierungspass" of 1974 is an exception. Working on the basis of more general objectives, the "Bildungspass" can be described as a portfolio-approach trying to "paint", through description and documentation, a broader picture of the competencies held by an employee. Together with formal education and training, the idea was to include a documentation of experience and practice, thus giving a more complete picture of the person in question. The "Bildungspass" never became a success, and was eventually given up. Description of single projects can be found elsewhere (CEDEFOP 1998a, 1999), and it should be emphasised that projects brought to our attention were initiated and financed by public institutions, at regional, national or European levels. Especially the last category of projects, notably through the Leonardo da Vinci and the Adapt programmes have become increasingly important in this area. This is a phenomena not limited to Austria and Germany, but can be found in most other countries covered here. ([6])

1.2.2. Non-formal learning in the Mediterranean context: Greece, Italy and Spain ([7])

There are certain common features linking together the Mediterranean countries of Greece, Italy and Spain in the area of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal

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([6]) By September 1999, CEDEFOP will have prepared a report on the projects within the Leonardo da Vinci Programme working within the area of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning.

([7]) The CEDEFOP study on "Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning" also covers Portugal. Due to different circumstances, the Portuguese report has not yet been concluded.. Information from elsewhere indicates that Portugal can be included in the picture drawn of Greece, Italy and Spain. The economic role of non-formal learning is very important in key sectors of the Portuguese economy. In a recently published article, Carneiro et.al. (1998) compares two Portuguese industrial sectors: shoe-industry and electronic-component industry. The latter is new in the Portuguese context, and based on employees with a relatively high formal education and training. The first, shoe-production is based on a very low level of formal education and training and is described as a sector reproducing and renewing itself through "on the job learning", in our context of non-formal learning. Carneiro uses the success story of the Portuguese shoe-industry, in which the ability to renew and grow has been very strong, to emphasise the huge potential of non-formal learning. The conclusion is that this form of learning, and the resulting competencies, is a crucial resource which has to be exploited in a much more conscious and systematic way.

learning. Compared to northern Europe, these countries (or at least certain regions of these countries), have a much weaker tradition in the area of vocational education and training. Only recently, over the last decade or so, initiatives have been taken to remedy this weakness.

Firstly, the relative weakness of vocational education and training is paralleled by the strength of academic theoretically-based education. Even though academic education in these countries no longer represents any guarantee of employment, high income or high status, the value attributed to formal certificates in general, and academic certificates in particular, is still substantial. In Greece, 70% of all youths prefer academic education to vocational education (CEDEFOP 1999a), despite a serious mismatch between the output of higher education institutions and the labour market demand. Secondly, the relative weakness of the formal vocational education and training system has established non-formal learning (in particular through work experience), as the domineering form of (vocational) competence reproduction and renewal. This means, and is probably of specific importance in Greece, the southern regions of Italy, and the less developed areas of Spain, that a vast reservoir of non-formal, experienced-based competencies exists. If this reservoir is going to be "tapped," and in particular if it is going to be renewed (quantitatively and qualitatively), it is necessary to identify and assess its strengths and weaknesses. The quality of competencies based on non-formal learning cannot and should not be taken for granted. Proper systems for identification and assessment could be one way to face this quality problem, and if necessary, point to the supplementary actions needed to improve quality and be entitled to recognition. Perhaps more than is the case in northern Europe, this illustrates the need for identification and assessment of non-formal learning. Although building on relative weak traditions in the field of vocational education and training, and facing a deep-rooted underrating of vocational competencies in general, and non-formal vocational competencies in particular, a growing willingness to change this can be observed. Throughout the last decade, all three countries have been reforming their vocational education and training systems and specifically Spain and Italy are now entering into the decisive stages of these reforms. The consequences in terms of methodologies and systems for the "identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning," are important, and probably of relevance to countries outside the Mediterranean area.

It is fair to say that the three countries, despite their common challenges, have treated the methodological and institutional aspects in different ways and with varying commitment and intensity. Greece may be described as the country within the EU where the role of non-formal learning is most dominant. The General Confederation of Greek Workers has estimated that only 30% of the Greek workforce has some type of formal professional qualification ([8]) and although general education is important, this means that a significant part of vocational competencies in Greece has been and still is being reproduced and renewed outside formal institutions. In spite of this, few initiatives have been taken to identify and assess these

([8]) Research in SMEs shows that 66% of these enterprises do not have a specialised technician; 13% of SME owners had a technical school degree; 49% completed 3 years of secondary school; 59% would not see they had any particular need for vocational training.

competencies. In 1994, the Organisation for Education and Vocational Training (OEEK), set up a working group to study the "accreditation of (non-formal) vocational training of adults." This work, which represents the most practical initiative so far in Greece, has put forward proposals for the creation of a system for the evaluation of experience, the assessment of gaps in knowledge, and a procedure securing the access to appropriate assessment and recognition. Although focusing on the aspect of experience, the emphasis of the group was more on the question of equivalence between different parts of the formal system. Some pathways are officially recognised, others are not; many individuals are facing a lack of consistency and are unable to build on prior training in non-recognised parts of the training system. Pilot studies of a sample of professions (four) were important parts of the OEEK initiative. In these professions, individuals were assessed and tested, illustrating how formal and non-formal learning is mixed and combined. Thus far, these experiences have not been integrated into the Greek system on a permanent basis. The investigation done by CEDEFOP (1999a) illustrates, however, that broad support exists for the introduction of methodologies and institutional arrangements in this area. There is a certain reluctance among unions of regulated, degree-holding professions and among university degrees, and this is partly linked to the question of wages and protected rights, challenged by new forms of recognition.

The Italian education and training system, and in particular vocational and continuing training, is currently undergoing a remarkable process of reform. Based on agreements between the government and the social partners (1993 and 1996), the outline of a more comprehensive and national Italian system can be detected. This is particularly clear in the law on "Promotion of employment" (1996/97), in which the basic principles of a (vocational) lifelong learning system is described. The 1996/97 law introduces the principle that competencies can be certified irrespective of the way in which they were acquired. Competencies acquired through work should be assessed and potentially recognised in the same way as competencies acquired through formal training institutions. This is a system where "the partial achievements of individuals in their own life paths" can be assessed and recognised. The new law thus adopts a combination of measures; a modular system of training, a system of training credits and tailored assessment and certification procedures. The aim is to integrate and interconnect the various systems (initial vocational education and training and continuing vocational training) and achieve "a personalisation" of learning routes. Though still at a very early stage of implementation, certain tensions have already occurred. As it is obvious that procedures and methodologies for the assessment and recognition of competencies (in general), will be of crucial importance, the development of these easily turn into a "battlefield" of different interests. Observers (CEDEFOP 1999b) point to the predominance of academic content and curricula in the assessment procedures; making it difficult to treat the non-formal learning elements (for example, from the workplace), in a fair and valid way. Two main instruments/tools have been developed. An "individual training record book" has been introduced (can be combined with formal attestations/certificates to form a portfolio), as well as "skills audits," introduced according to different models in the various regions. Observers (CEDEFOP op.cit.) also indicate that these approaches are seriously hampered, for the time being, by the lack of clear-cut definitions/regulations of the tools in question, and furthermore, the lack of a system of national standards to promote consistent and comparable practices.

While being the most important obstacle to reliable and valid assessments, the lack of a national standard is not the only obstacle to be dealt with. Lack of resources limit the feasibility of the approach; a problem which now can be linked to the still existing low social esteem held in this field. The tripartite basis of the current Italian reforms may prove important. The dominance of academic values and the lack of a proper set of standards, may cause delays. The basic aim of creating an output-based, competency-based system of education and training, is, however, of great importance and crucial if the role of non-formal learning is to be strengthened.

The Italian reform movement in the area of vocational and continuing education and training is paralleled, albeit in an even more comprehensive way, by Spain. Since 1990, three important legal/political initiatives have been taken. A law on "the general regulation of the education system," was introduced by the Ministry of Education in 1990, and two interlinked "national vocational training programmes" (I and II), were introduced by the Ministry of Labour in 1993 and 1997. The purpose of all these initiatives, which are linked, is to integrate the different sub-systems of training and different forms of acquisition of competencies (i.e., combine "regulated, occupational, continuing training and work experience" with each other). This bridging effort is clearly based on an output-oriented, competence-based view of vocational training education. It can also be said to aim at a lifelong learning system in the same area. Until now, the role of non-formal learning has been weak in the Spanish formal system. Confined to the level of enterprises, the transfer of non-formally based competencies has been difficult. The restructuring of the education and training system, however, implies that this may change. Two initiatives are of particular interest in this context. Firstly, the integrated service plans for employment (SIPE), establish procedures for the competence assessment of the unemployed. Using a combination of "occupational interviews," in order to identify the vocational and competence profile of the individual, and "occupational qualification tests," this procedure aims to improve the basis of guidance and improve the self-understanding of the individual's own strengths and limitations. The procedure does not, however, lead to any formal recognition. The certificates of occupational proficiency, secondly, represent an effort to certify non-formal learning. Set up in 1995 (Royal Decree 787/1995), the system currently covers 185 vocational titles in 22 sectors/areas. A certificate of occupational proficiency can be obtained through two main pathways. The "training pathway" is the dominant one, whereas the "work experience pathway" is of minor importance. The Ministry of Labour, responsible for the scheme, has identified the following aims:

(a) identify the characteristics of vocational competence and thus objectify accreditation;

(b) integrate vocational training in a system which will guarantee the acquisition of vocational competencies;

(c) increase the minimum training content of workers;

(d) give certification national validity;

(e) accredit, through work experience, the qualifications of workers who do not have a formal title.

The practical testing will be conducted by an assessment committee of seven provincial or sectoral based external observers. (CEDEFOP 1999c) suggests that the developmental work within this field is biased through the overemphasising of the formal training path. Although the legal base ascribes the same value to the formal and non-formal routes, there is an impression that those attempting to be certified on the basis of experience, face a growing number of obstacles. Currently, the establishment of methodologies and arrangements to assess and recognise non-formal learning in Spain much depends on the parallel development of "national systems for qualifications," a reference point which could provide a better basis for integration and interconnection of the various forms of competence acquisition. This system, or standard, was foreseen in the first "national vocational training programme" from 1993, and has been under development since then. Presumed to be supported by a "national institute of qualifications," it is recognised as of vital importance in the time to come.

In addition to the elements mentioned so far in the Spanish system, is collective bargaining, an instrument for the regulation of the occupational classification system. Collective bargaining at sectoral level has led to some progress in the area of occupational classification. Agreeing on general classifications, thus doing away with purely company-specific reference frameworks, has made it possible to start work on procedures where workers can be assessed and paid according to these categories. Specifically in the chemical and construction sectors some progress has been made. Although still not very widely used, a professional skills card has been introduced in the construction sector. The trade union organisations responsible for issuing these cards are already complaining about the practical problems faced in this respect.

As was the case in Germany and Austria, but to an even greater extent, the role of experimentation within publicly financed projects is important. The examples of Greece, Italy and Spain illustrate the importance of EU initiatives and support in this area. Individuals and institutions from all countries have participated in projects and programmes focusing on questions of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. Italy is a good example, and a substantial amount of experience has been gained especially over the last two-to-four years. This project approach can be described as "bottom-up" in the sense that no centrally established direction or objective has been established. The projects in question seem to have been based on the interests and needs of those individuals and institutions involved and not on the general national policies in the area. While supporting innovative practices and widening the scope of experimentation, the problem may be one of implementation and dissemination. Avoiding a detailed examination of all projects concerned, ([9]) the majority of projects have focused on three main groups: women, long-term unemployed, and employed at risk. In one case, young school dropouts were covered. An impressive variety of identification and assessment methodologies and instruments were suggested/developed in these projects, essentially based on three systems:

([9]) In 1997, 24 of the Italian Leonardo and 27 of the Italian Adapt projects covered, at least in theory, subjects of certification/recognition (CEDEFOP 1999b).

(a) More or less structured individual discussions in which the person's own statements prevail.

(b) Self-assessment of personal characteristics using ad hoc instruments.

(c) Self-assessment through group exercises.

Since no system framework and no formal reference point exist, the assessments are left "on their own," attributing different validity and legitimacy to the resulting judgements. The main value of these projects, it seems, is to serve as a reservoir of experiences, potentially supporting the more system-integrated assessment tools introduced on a permanent basis.

Compared to the German and Austrian situation, the Mediterranean countries (with the exception of Greece) are more explicit in their efforts to link non-formal and formal systems of learning. Although reform processes are still in their initial phases, the elements already introduced indicate a strengthening of the role of non-formal learning relative to the formal system. As the research of Carneiro (1998, see also footnote 6) indicates, this changing emphasis may be of specific importance in these countries, as the "reservoir" of non-formally based competencies are of crucial importance to major sectors of the economy.

1.2.3. Non-formal learning in the Nordic context: Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark ([10])

In two of the four countries discussed in this section, Finland and Norway, the issue of non-formal learning has moved into the forefront of the public education and training debates, as well as become the subject of important and far-reaching institutional experimentation and reform. In the two other countries, and notably in Sweden, interest in this subject is more limited. From the outset it is not clear why this difference has occurred. The four countries in question share important common traditions in the area of education and training. Mutual learning has been an important aspect of the development of national systems and a shared Nordic labour market has made cross-border transfer of competencies a normal and accepted matter of fact. Two things in particular should be mentioned.

(a) Education and training is highly institutionalised and formalised, covering major parts of each age group.

(b) Education, and especially vocational education and training, is very much a tripartite matter of concern. The steering of training is based on the participation and influence of state employers as well as employees.

During the last three-to-four decades, however, the countries in question have chosen different approaches to education and training. This applies in particular to vocational education and

([10]) Iceland, the fifth Nordic country has, due to capacity reasons, not been included in the CEDEFOP study.

training at upper secondary level, where today we can distinguish between four distinct, and to a certain degree, different models.

The Norwegian model has revitalised the apprenticeship element in the vocational part of upper secondary education by making work experience an obligatory and integrated part of all courses since 1994. Vocational training in Norway is based on an initial (general) introduction to the subjects in the form of two years of school-based education and training. After this, two years in an enterprise or institution follows aimed at specialisation and development of competencies through work experience (CEDEFOP 1999d). Currently, a reform of the system of continuing education and training is being introduced. Within this system, methodologies and institutions for the assessment and recognition of non-formal learning (realkompetanse) is going to be integrated. The Finnish system is characterised as competence-based and operates according to a modularised structure. A core element of this system is that "skills and knowledge can be demonstrated and recognised regardless of how they have been acquired." Made operational through a new law on vocational education in1994, the competence-based qualifications system is divided into three qualification categories: an initial vocational qualification, a further vocational qualification and, lastly, a specialist vocational education (CEDEFOP 1999e). The Danish vocational education and training system can be described as dual in its character, very much based on an apprenticeship approach to training. This initial education and training has been supplemented by a system of continuing vocational education and training, very much integrated into labour market policies. Currently, a broad reform of adult education is being discussed (Undervisningsministeriet 1997 and CEDEFOP 1999f), mainly following the tendencies described in the Norwegian and Finnish cases, indicating that the role of non-formal learning has to be revised in order to establish an education and training system linking levels and various learning pathways. The Swedish model is mainly school based. Although becoming more open to apprenticeships, the vast majority of candidates receive their vocational training through training and instruction in specialised schools. Officially, there is an aim to provide a certain practically oriented training in enterprises (approximately 20% of the time), but this has proven difficult to realise (CEDEFOP 1999g).

The different institutional and organisational choices in the four countries may be linked to a different emphasis on the importance of work-based learning. The recent Finnish and Norwegian reforms very much underline the importance of work experience-based learning by introducing institutional changes supporting this form of learning. This emphasis has not been so clearly expressed in the Swedish context. The Danish perspective can largely be compared to that of Germany and Austria. The focus has predominantly been towards initial education and training within a dual model, generally considered as sufficient to cover the aspect of learning through experience. There might be a link between these differences and current activity in the area of non-formal learning. Finland can be described as the frontrunner in this area, based on the introduction of the system of competence-based qualifications. Norway has increased its efforts during the last couple of years while Denmark, and particularly Sweden seem to be more reluctant. The Finnish and Norwegian approaches now define work-based,

non-formal learning as an essential part of national vocational education systems. A closer look into the experiences of these countries may therefore prove useful.

As already indicated, the Finnish competence-based qualification system is described as output or performance based. The precondition for achieving a qualification is demonstration of the vocational competence and not participation in a particular education. Competence-based qualifications are officially recognised and protected by law. Titles are regulated by the Ministry of Education, but in close concert with the Ministry of Labour and the social partners. Apart from the ministries and national social partner organisations, the practical work is organised in the following way. Expert groups, administered by the National Board of Education, conduct the actual preparations for "the national guidelines," that is, the requirements/achievements of the qualification in question. Within the expert group, at least the social partners, teachers and preferably self-employed professionals, should be represented. Examination boards (250 in all) are responsible for the organisation and supervision of the tests. They approve the accomplishments of the qualifications and sign certificates. The examination board also has a supervisory status, making contracts for the organisation of tests/assessments with educational institutions (or other institutions) that have the necessary expertise. Contracts for the organisation of skill tests involve assessors of the test performance, maintenance and development of the vocational competence of the assessors and a number of other elements. In spite of the existence of national guidelines for each qualification which may be understood as the important point of reference, the actual carrying out of the assessment varies, pointing to the problem of reliability and possibly validity. In order to "combat" this problem, a national project (ALVAR) has been initiated to ensure that the skills tests in certain occupational areas will be nationally comparable, and that the requirement levels correspond to appropriate needs in working life. ALVAR gathers and trains experts for the preparation of the test task. Training for organisations conducting tests is also organised. Finally, ALVAR develops and maintains a "test bank" to support the general search for reliable, criterion-referenced testing and assessment. The ALVAR project, financially supported by the European Social Fund, is an interesting example of quality assurance within the area of testing and assessment. The underlying perspective is that it is impossible to specify beforehand in detail, how an assessment is going to be conducted. The most sensible way of assuring reliability and hopefully, validity, is thus to support training of assessors and networking of assessors. Although this process is still too recent to evaluate in concept, it is promising. Finally, following the work of all these institutions, groups and individuals, the actual skills test/assessment may take place if different options are provided:

(a) The assessment is made on the basis of a portfolio (samples of work products, project works, partial evidence, including employers' descriptions of work tasks, and competence).

(b) The assessment is made at his/her workplace, supplemented by written/oral interviews.

(c) The assessment is held at the educational institution which organises the test.

The Finnish competence-based qualification system is still in its initial phase. The number of candidates passing through seems to be increasing. In 1998, 10000 are estimated to have passed through the system.

The right to have non-formal competencies acquired outside the formal education and training system formally certified, was stated as a general right in the Norwegian Adult Education Act of 1976. However, little progress has been made when it comes to the development of procedures and institutional arrangements. The law of 1976 has served as a symbol of intention in this direction, but not as a tool to realise this objective. The single most important form of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Norway, is that in which a candidate may take a final examination for apprentices (crafts examination) on the basis of his/her practical work experience. This arrangement was introduced as early as 1952 in the Act concerning vocational training. In Section 20 of this Act, it is stipulated that "the craft examination may be taken without any contract of apprenticeship by those who have not less than 25% longer general practice in the craft, than the period of apprenticeship." During the 1970s and 1980s the utilisation of the scheme was moderate. During the 1990s this has changed and almost exploded during the period 1997-98. Approximately 14000 candidates attended in each of those years, double for a "normal year." As an average age group is approximately 60000, these numbers are extremely high. A few branches dominate notably construction, transport, health and social care and the metal/electro-mechanical industry, and the popularity of the scheme may be looked upon as, firstly a reflection of the relatively low level of formal training in these areas, and secondly, as a reflection of the general pressure towards formalising qualifications (wage reasons, security, etc.).

The Section 20 scheme is not, however, the only element of the Norwegian approach to assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. Since 1996, work on the reform of the continuing vocational education and training system has been conducted. A committee forwarded their suggestions in 1997, emphasising the importance of establishing broad-ranging methodologies and initiatives for the assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in general, and not only in relation to the apprenticeship scheme. This proposal has been followed up by the Parliament which is in the process of forwarding a general reform of the CVT system. The Ministry of Education and Research has been made responsible for developing a national system for identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning (or "Realkompetanse"), in the coming two-year period.

Although the debate on non-formal learning has been limited in Denmark, we find elements in the existing system trying to integrate this kind of learning. The first example of this is the apprenticeship-programme for adults (Voksenerhvervsuddannelsen, VEUD). This scheme makes it possible for adults to be exempted from parts of the formal, initial training, on the basis of prior, educational or occupational experience. The decision on exemption is taken by the relevant trade committee. The VEUD-programme operates according to an individualised approach which identifies the experience of each candidate and sets up a training plan according to this. Also within the ordinary initial vocational education and training schemes, exemption can be granted on the basis of prior work experiences. If the application for

exemption concerns a school subject, the school in question handles the request. If the reduction of training time is more than four weeks, the trade committee is consulted. The same is the case if the exemption concerns practical parts of the programme. Finally, it should be mentioned that the labour market training act of 1995 provides a clearer focus on the role of learning through experience at work. Following this act, courses trying to assist individuals in identifying their competencies were started, aiming at subsequent training. These courses have a duration of one to three weeks and can be characterised as a combination of assessment and vocational guidance.

As indicated in the introduction to this section, Swedish initiatives in this area have been few, and more related to specific groups (immigrants, disabled, unemployed), than to the general public. The project "immigrants as a resource," initiated in 1988, developed a testing programme for immigrants with vocational qualifications. This scheme (PTVI), was divided into a practical and a theoretical part, taking between two-to-twelve weeks to complete. After testing, the candidate received a written description of equivalent Swedish education and training requirements. Until 1992, the National Labour Market Board was responsible for organising vocational tests of all the unemployed who wished to be tested. Since 1992, this service has been decentralised to the local employment offices, resulting in a sharp decline in testing. The local offices are nowadays forced to choose when and to what extent testing should be carried out. The reasons for the decline are complex, but the costs, and the complexity of the testing itself, are mentioned as possible explanations.

Concluding the elaboration on the "Nordic model," it is fair to say that no such thing exists. The debate in this section shows that Finland, Norway, Denmark and Sweden have chosen different approaches. While Finland and Norway, are currently opening up for the institutional integration of non-formal learning as part of a general lifelong learning strategy, Sweden is not very active. Plans presented in Denmark may indicate that the question of non-formal learning will become more focused in the years to come.

1.2.4. The influence of the NVQs; UK, Ireland and the Netherlands

The UK system of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) has, since its inception in the late 1980s, served as the most outspoken and clear example of a competence-based, performance-related, output-oriented system of vocational education and training. Although controversial in the UK, the NVQ system has served as an example of an alternative to the traditional, school-based model of education and training. The system is, in principle, open to any learning path and learning form, emphasising, in particular, experience-based learning at work. As stated in the presentations of the system (and repeated by those countries embracing a similar thinking), it does not matter how or where you have learned, what matters is what you have learned. Such a system, if working according to its own principles, is of course open to the learning taking place outside the formal education and training institutions, what we, in this context have termed as non-formal learning. It is no coincidence that the questions of assessment and recognition have become crucial in the debate on the current status of the

NVQ system and its future prospects. The UK experiences in the area of assessment of non-formal learning, which should be looked upon as an integral part of the general assessment challenge, are also highly important for the development of assessment practices and approaches in other European countries. It is, however, important to adopt a more critical approach to these experiences than what has been the case thus far. In some instances there has been a tendency to copy the NVQ system and not to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses. In the following sections, we will try to discuss some of the underlying assumptions of the NVQ system and how these have been met in reality. The four basic assumptions are (Eraut et.al.1996):

(a) A near perfect match between national standards and competencies at work.

(b) Because training and assessment both occur at the workplace, high validity of assessments is achieved.

(c) Competencies gained are transferable.

(d) Detailed specifications together with trained assessors will ensure both validity and reliability.

Until now, there has been an insistent rhetoric that NVQs reflect the needs of employers, and although far from perfect, represent the best effort so far to merge national and company-specific demands. It is true that employers are represented in (the former) leading bodies and standards councils, but several weaknesses of both a practical and fundamental character have occurred. Firstly, there are limits to what a relatively small group of employer representatives can contribute often on the basis of scarce resources and limited time. Secondly, the more powerful and more technically knowledgeable organisations usually represent large companies with good training records and wield the greatest influence. Smaller, less influential organisations will obtain less relevant results. Thirdly, disagreements in committees, irrespective of who is represented, are more easily resolved by inclusion than exclusion, inflating the scope of the qualifications. Generally speaking, there is a conflict of interest between national standards, firstly, the commitment to describing competencies valid on a universal basis and, secondly, the commitment to create precise standards to minimise the scope for different interpretations when making assessments.

Historically, there has been a shift from narrow task analysis to a broader functions analysis. This principle is oriented towards the need to create national standards describing transferable competencies. Observers have noted that the introduction of functions was paralleled by detailed descriptions of every element in each function, prescribing performance criteria and the range of conditions for successful performance. The length and complexity of NVQs, currently a much criticised factor, stems from this "dynamic." As Wolf (1995) says, we seem to have entered a "never ending spiral of specifications." Researchers at the University of Sussex (Eraut op.cit.) have concluded on the challenges facing NVQ-based assessments: pursuing perfect reliability leads to meaningless assessment. Pursuing perfect validity leads towards assessments which cover everything relevant, but take too much time, and leave too

little time left for learning. Perfect validity means endless assessment, perfect reliability means meaningless assessment.

We have intentionally undercommunicated some of the more specific methodological tools developed in the wake of the establishment of the NVQ system. Approaches like accreditation of prior learning (APL), and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), have become less visible as the NVQ system has settled. This is an understandable and fully reasonable development as all assessment approaches in the NVQ system in principle have to face the challenge of experientially-based learning, i.e., learning outside the formal school context. The experiences from APL and APEL are thus being integrated into the NVQ-system. In a way, this is an example of the maturing of the system. The UK system, being one of the first to try to construct a performance-based system, linking the various formal and non-formal learning paths, illustrates the dilemmas of assessing and recognising non-formal learning better than most other systems because there has been time to observe and study systematically the problems and possibilities. A major issue is the close link between standard and assessment. The formulation of standards: who takes part, how much time and resources do they have at their disposal, how do they approach the task of describing these functions, performances or outputs.

The Irish accreditation of prior learning (APL) approach is clearly based on the same performance-based approach to assessment as we find in the UK. This is hardly surprising, since the mutual learning between these countries has been strong, and is still so. The Irish experience, however, is of a more limited character than the British. FÀS, the Irish training and employment authority, has been the main promoter and initiator in this field to date. The accreditation of prior learning is integrated into the general certification framework. The following principles are emphasised: firstly, FÀS certifies skills and skills levels, not courses. The performance-based output-orientated perspective found in the NVQs and elsewhere, is thus central to the Irish model. Secondly, a modular training programme is matched by modular assessment. Thirdly, emphasis is on practical and personal skills as well as related knowledge. Fourthly, industrial standards have been established through cooperation and participation with relevant interest groups. Lastly, assessment should be criterion referenced, and each assessment should be linked to key objectives identifying the skills and knowledge to be demonstrated. Actual experience with APL in Ireland, however, has been limited. Since 1992, projects in retail, construction and electricity supply, have been carried out, utilising somewhat different methodological approaches. The future development of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Ireland is not clear. While being important, FÀS represents only one part of the Irish certification landscape and it has yet to be seen whether the establishment of TEASTAS, a national body intended to nationalise certification of vocational education and training programmes, will make a difference. It should also be noted that the "project approach" of FÀS, promoting APL in time-limited projects towards limited areas/branches, does not guarantee the permanent introduction of these methodologies. It is fair to say, however, that a certain amount of experience has been gained from these APL projects, supplemented by participation in diverse European programmes and projects.

The Dutch approach to assessment and recognition of non-formal learning can in some respects be compared to the Irish. The influence of the UK-NVQ system is evident, but the general performance-based modular system has been translated into a specific Dutch variant, differing from the British. The actual development of methodologies, especially those promoted by the Ministry of Education through CINOP (CEDEFOP 1999h), can also be characterised as limited in approach, thus far being tested in a limited number of sectors and occupational areas. As in the Irish case, important methodological experiences have been made, of interest also to other European countries. The CINOP assessment model is very well documented (Klarus 1998, CEDEFOP 1999g)). It is centred on a practical task to be solved and consists of three distinct stages: planning, execution and evaluation. Within these stages, different assessment methodologies are used and the aspects focused on differ from each other. In the first stage, planning, the aim is to assess the candidate's methodological competencies and his or her ability to plan the task ahead. Criterion referenced interviews are used together with observation of work preparation. The second stage focuses on the actual execution of the task, trying to assess execution as well as reflective skills. Assessment is based on a combination of observation (of process and result) and a criterion-oriented interview. In the third stage, evaluating/adjusting, the aim is to assess the reflective skills of the candidate. The candidate is asked to reflect on the task performed, to identify alternative ways of doing it, and to indicate how the chosen approach could be transferred to other working situations. The CINOP approach is linked to and based on the already existing qualification structure (standard) for secondary vocational education. The approach is clearly integrated into the framework of the Educational and Vocational Training Act (WEB) and can thus be looked upon as an initiative to link non-formal learning to the formal system. The Dutch qualification standard is based on job and task analysis and it can also be characterised as industry driven (social partners take part, at all levels, in the definition of the standards). The content of the qualification is divided into three types; vocational competencies, competencies for further development and social and cultural competencies. All relevant parties, government, social partners and representatives of the educational system, have agreed that different learning pathways should be accepted and supported. As pointed out by several observers (CEDEFOP 1999i), the Dutch approach to non-formal learning is more than the CINOP model. Experiments are currently being undertaken both at national and branch levels, in order to develop methodologies and systems for the identification and assessment of non-formal learning. Initiators and target groups differ, from those seeking national, official certificates or exemption from parts of the training (as in the CINOP approach), to branches and enterprises trying to identify and assess the competencies held by their employees.

Concluding our discussion of the three countries covered in this section, the overwhelming acceptance of an output-oriented, performance-based model of education and training is most striking. The general acceptance of learning outside formal education and training institutions as a valid and important pathway to competencies, seems hardly to be questioned. What is questioned, however, is how such a system should be realised. The UK and the Dutch experiences illustrate clearly some of the institutional, methodological and practical problems linked to establishing a system able to integrate non-formal learning within its framework. The challenge of developing an accepted qualification standard seems to represent the first

and perhaps most serious obstacle. As long as assessments are supposed to be criterion-referenced, the quality of the standard is crucial. The UK experiences identify some of these difficulties, balancing between too general and too specific descriptions and definitions of competencies. The second important challenge illustrated in the UK and Dutch cases, but not reflected in our material on the Irish experiences, is related to the classical assessment challenges of reliability and validity. In our material, the problems have been clearly demonstrated but the answers, if they exist, not so clearly indicated. The Finns, by networking and training assessors and relevant institutions, have probably indicated one possible strategy. Concluding that qualification standards can never achieve a perfect balance between general and specific descriptions, the Finns focus on the competencies of the assessors. This is probably relevant in the UK, Dutch and Irish cases as well.

1.2.5. A French approach? France and Belgium ([11])

France has been characterised as an extreme case of "certificate fixation" (Merle 1998). As in the cases of Italy and Greece (3.3), a certificate not only reflects a formal level of attainment, but the qualities of a person and the rank he or she is entitled to. Mehaut (1977) points to three functions met by French certificates: firstly as an internal standard of the education system; secondly as an external standard for the labour market; and, thirdly, as a personal and hierarchical identifier. This "certificate fixation" is perhaps best reflected in the system of the "grandes écoles", but influences behaviour in other areas as well, including vocational education and training. The high value attributed to certificates in France is very much linked to the national and homogeneous character of the education and training systems. Education, including vocational education and training, has been provided within predefined, complete national routes, leaving little room for personal or institutional experimentation. Although changes have taken place during the last decade, the stability of the system has contributed to its transparency; individuals and employers are in the main familiar with the various qualifications awarded at national level.

During the past 10 to15 years, these systems have increasingly been questioned. Stability, it is emphasised, can also be interpreted as rigidity. The homogeneity of the system may easily turn into an obstacle to the renewal of knowledge and competencies with alternative forms of learning not being accepted because they do not fit into the prescribed routes defined by the national systems. This criticism has been expressed in a number of contexts, gradually "spilling over" into legal and institutional reforms aiming at a closer link between formal education and training and the learning taking place at work. Basically, we talk of two sets of legal initiatives with somewhat different profiles and objectives. Firstly, the 1985 law on the "Bilan de competence" permits the validation of professional competencies acquired outside formal education. The initiative may come from the enterprise or from the worker him-

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([11]) Luxembourg would normally have been presented in this chapter. After consultations with representatives of the educational authorities of Luxembourg, CEDEFOP concluded that the level of activity in this area was too low to defend an independent national study.

/herself. This right was strengthened through the Law of December 1991 which states that employees are entitled to educational leave for the bilan. The aim of the "Bilan de competence" is, according to the Law of 1991, to permit the employee to understand his or her professional and personal competencies as well their motivation and aptitudes in order to facilitate their professional as well as their educational plans and careers. A bilan is divided into three phases: firstly, a preliminary phase where the motivation and needs of the employee is clarified and where the procedures/methodologies of the bilan are presented. Secondly, an investigative phase where motivation, personal and professional interests as well as personal and professional competencies are analysed and mapped out. Finally, the results of the analyses are presented to the candidate and used as a basis for dialogue on future training and career plans. After having concluded the process, the candidate receives a synthesis document which is supposed to identify clearly his or her personal and professional competencies, thus helping to clarify the necessary steps to be taken to realise future plans. On average, the described process requires 19 hours. A total of 700 "centres de bilan" have been set up all over France. In 1994, these centres issued 125000 bilans at an estimated cost of 340 million FF. Three quarters of all requests were made by employees, 52 % of these being women, 44% in the age group 16-25 and 47% in the age group 26-44. Almost 50% of those asking for a bilan indicated that "elaboration d'un project professionel" was their main objective, 20% "recherche d'emploi", 21% "recherche de formation". Only a very small percentage, 1.9%, indicated that the bilan was a first step taken in order to be validated relative to a certificate or diploma in the formal education and training system.

Secondly, the law of July 1992 on the validation of skills acquired by work experience is directly linked to the national framework of diplomas and certificates, and thus recognises the legal equality between competencies acquired inside and outside formal education and training. This law, administered by the Ministry of Education and linked to the initial training system (leading to a "Certificate d'aptitude professionelle" (CAP) or a certain level of the "Brevet de tecnicien supérieur" (BTS), is paralleled by a system for "assessment of competencies and skills acquired through work experience" (EVAP), developed by the Ministry of Labour. This system is linked to the certificates issued by the Ministry based on continuing training. Certificates issued by the Ministries of Education and Labour are both based on specifications (standards) drawn up in agreement with the social partners in consultative committees (CPSs). Normally, the work of the CPSs has been closely linked to a specific training course but acceptance of experiential learning as a legitimate qualification pathway implies that the specifications also have to consider this aspect. Different from the "Bilan de competence", the potential of the 1992 Law has yet to be realised. Merle (op.cit.) is of the opinion that the system for acquiring formal qualifications through validation of skills acquired on the job "...has been slow to get under way and is far from meeting workers' expectations".

While the Laws of 1985, 1991 and 1992 are important indicators of a changing attitude towards non-formal learning in France, the qualifications awarded by the Centres d'etudes thermiques et energiques (CTH) and Certificates of vocational qualifications (CQP) can be looked upon as an alternative to the traditional certification system because they relate to

(practical) skills used in firms and are less linked to following a course. So far, industries have been very cautious in creating CQP, the number awarded annually is not much in excess of 4000. Originally, CQPs were designed to certify qualifications of young people who had followed a course of alternating on-the-job and off-the-job training. Today, the industries developing CQPs have given them very different functions: certification complementing the national education system, recognition leading to career advancement and a system of industry certification paralleling that of the national education system.

In many ways, France can be looked upon as the country in Europe with the longest and broadest experience in the area of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. The legal base established through the Laws of 1985, 1991 and 1992, indicates clearly that non-formal learning is important and that its place, relative to that of formal learning, should be clarified and strengthened. Furthermore, the practical experience gained from the system of "Bilan de competence" is important. Both in terms of volume/costs and methodological experiences, the system of "Bilan de competenmce" is important also outside France. Non-formal learning has, more than in other European countries, become an important part of the political debate on education, training and work. The topic is integrated into the national political discourse among social partners and has also become a topic covered by researchers. Michelle Virville's proposal that national sets of qualification benchmarks should be set up within a tripartite structure to allow all validated qualifications, whatever their basis, to be formulated in a common language, can be looked upon as an example of the growing importance attributed to this topic in the French context. On the other hand, the traditionally strong position of formal certificates and diplomas indicates that non-formal learning will not automatically be trusted in the same way as formal learning. In France, as in other countries, legal recognition of non-formal learning is just a first step and general acceptance of alternative forms of learning is another matter.

The Belgian situation is very different from that of France. According to accessible information (CEDEFOP 1999i), the debate on these issues is almost non-existent, and very few initiatives have been taken in the area of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. Vocational training in Belgium mainly takes place in educational institutions, more specifically in schools specialised in vocational and technical education and training. A very small proportion of young people take part in vocational training through apprenticeships. There might be a link between this predominantly school-oriented approach to training and the lack of focus on non-formal learning outside formal education. This has to be elaborated in future studies to be published by CEDEFOP.

An initiative has however, been taken by the Conseil de l'education et de la formation of the French community in Belgium. Their suggestion from 1997/98 is to reform (harmonise) the entire system of validation linked to vocational and professional competencies, initial and continuing. A broader conception of qualifications compared to that of the existing system is emphasised and proposed. According to this proposal, a qualification must be defined as the totality of those competencies necessary to execute a task or those interlinked tasks necessary to have a vocation. Competencies acquired through work experience are underlined, pointing

to the potential inclusion of non-formal learning in the assessment practises of the Belgian education and training system. As a neighbouring country to both France and the Netherlands, very little cross-boarder influence can be detected. Neither the French activity in this area during the past 15 years nor the influence of the Dutch experimentation seem to have affected the Belgian system very much. Whether this will change in the near future remains to be seen.

1.3. Conclusions

Generally speaking, the focus on non-formal learning at work, in leisure activities and at home, is not so much a question of increasing the capacity of learning as it is of improving the quality of learning. Having surveyed the different Member States of the EU on this issue, the basic motivation behind efforts in attempting to capture non-formal learning seems to be the hope to identify and utilise other forms of learning and knowledge than those stemming from the formal system. As the White Paper (1995) states: There is a need for a broader knowledge base, a need to combine the qualities of specialised teaching in education and training institutions and the qualities of experienced-based learning from actual and practical working/life situations.

In this way, the growing interest and focus on non-formal learning is perhaps not so paradoxical as it may seem at first glance. Perhaps it can be viewed as a more mature way of understanding the dynamics underlying reproduction and renewal of knowledge and competencies. This view emphasises the heterogeneous character of learning. Learning cannot be standardised, we should rather try to utilise and combine as many and as various forms of learning as possible.

Methodologies and institutions for the assessment of non-formal learning can be looked upon as necessary tools to build bridges between the various forms of learning, from education to work and from initial education and training to continuing education and training. Generally speaking, countries within the EU/EEA have a long way to go. We find few examples of methodologies and/or institutions operating at full scale as integrated parts of the permanent national systems. More countries have established a legal base for such systems but experimentation at project-level, practical and permanent implementation has yet to be accomplished.

Although incomplete, the experimentation and planning taking place in most EU/EEA countries is an important signal of a changing perspective. Learning taking place outside formal education and training institutions is increasingly receiving attention. The exact role of methodologies and institutions aiming at the assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in the future is difficult to predict. However, based on the evidence of the CEDEFOP project on identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, the tendency to strengthen links between the formalised and the non-formalised domains of learning can be observed in all Member States of the EU/EEA and is gaining momentum.

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2. Why Measure Human Capital?

Riel Miller ([12])

2.1. Introduction

The question "why measure human capital?" belongs to that category of queries which find a more complete response by exploring what might happen in the future. Of course such "future contingent" questions and answers have roots in the past and present. But, as will be argued over the following pages, in this case a much richer analysis emerges if consideration is given to developments which may occur over the next twenty to thirty years. By considering what might happen in the medium to long-run future new light is thrown on both why and how the quality of human capital information could be significantly improved.

This exercise is a bit like imagining what it was like to answer another question that was posed long ago: why introduce universal compulsory schooling? At the time, over a century ago, the answers were not so obvious. Why should governments deny parents the income or labour provided by children working in the field, factory or mine? Who could be sure that all of these new pupils were capable of learning in a classroom? What made books a better way of teaching than experience? Why train children to obey a stranger? Will it even be possible to build enough schools, find enough teachers and extract sufficient tax revenue to pay for the educational system?

Over the years plenty of convincing responses were found to these questions. Not every country came up with the same answers nor have all of the questions gone away. Still, for the most part, there is now widespread acceptance of the practical feasibility as well as economic and social validity of the school system's legal and institutional structure. This hard won legitimacy is largely rooted in the broad changes associated with the long process of industrialisation and urbanisation. Today it seems obvious, not only that a universal and compulsory school system is feasible but that without it the wealthy industrial societies characteristic of OECD countries would be impossible.

Current clarity regarding the answers to yesterday's questions offers little consolation to the long-departed decision makers of the 19th century who had to make the tough choices and speculative arguments in favour of introducing a vast school infrastructure. Similarly, from today's perspective, the arguments in favour of introducing the frameworks necessary for measuring human capital probably seem as farfetched as the proposals to introduce compulsory universal education did a century ago. The main justifications are still waiting for

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events that have yet to fully unfold. Many crucial questions remain unanswered. What is meant by "measuring human capital"? Is it really feasible to measure what people know? What would justify the kind of infrastructure necessary for the effective, efficient and universal measurement of human capital? Might existing credentialling systems be undermined? Will treating people like capital be dehumanising?

Neither these questions nor the tentative answers that are quietly emerging as part of the transition to a "learning society" have the ready familiarity that characterises current debates about the future of schooling or education reform. Nevertheless, as is briefly reviewed over the following pages, the economic and social changes taking place - initially in OECD countries - may create both the need and capacity to undertake universal, lifelong, inexpensive and accurate measurement of human capital.

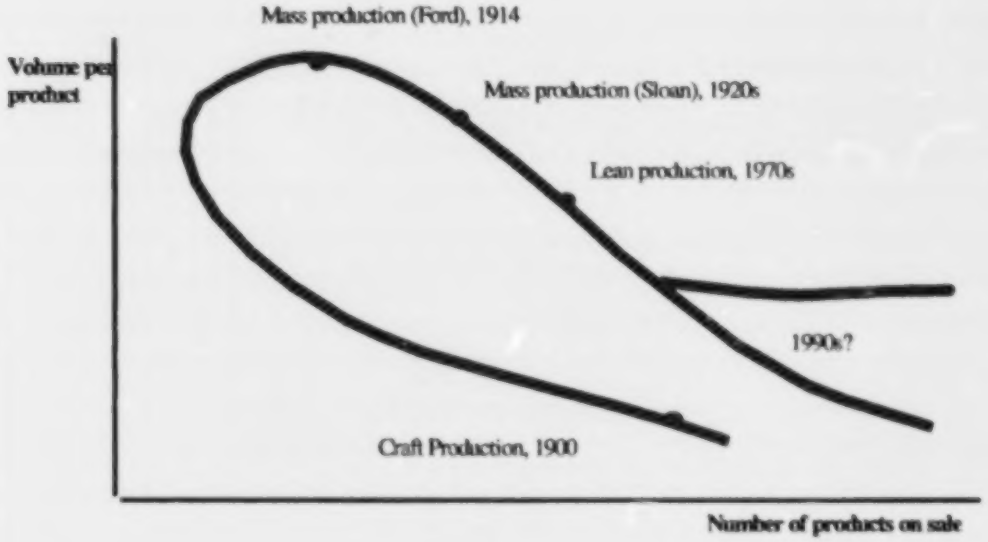
2.2. Emergence of a learning economy and society

Three basic characteristics of the emerging learning economy and society are likely to both facilitate and require the introduction of vastly more efficient methods for measuring human capital: a) the growing knowledge intensity of economic activity, b) the integration of production and consumption, and c) the transformation of social decision making.

2.2.1. Knowledge intensity of economic activity

There are many indicators that point towards the growing knowledge intensity of economic activity. One of the most important trends is the shift away from the fixed design or once-only conceptual input characteristic of mass-produced items. In typical mass production sectors of the economy, such as the automobile industry presented in Diagram 1, the output often consists of a relatively limited number of designs (number of products). Henry Ford famously explained the limits of early mass-production when he stated: "You can have any colour (car) you want, so long as it's black".

Diagram 1: Conceptual Input to Automotive Production



Source: J.P. Womack, D.T. Jones y D. Roos, The Machine that Changed the World, Rawson Associates, 1990

Today the primary trend in OECD countries is not only towards so-called "mass-customisation" in the field of manufacturing but equally in the now dominant service side of the economy where there is a shift to personalization. Service providers, from grocery and clothing stores to airlines and universities, are all trying to profile their customers in order to deliver output tailored to the individual. Even McDonalds style food services are trying to broaden the range of products they produce in order to appeal to locally specific tastes and individual customers. For instance a salad bar, where the customer makes their own choices – specifying the types of ingredients and quantities – means that the individual adds an important and perhaps decisive part (in terms of the decision to buy) to the final product's design.

Even though many of the initiatives towards customisation are still modest, working from a limited menu of choices offered by the supplier, the direction is clear. More knowledge – particularly the specific tastes or desires of the customer – is being added to both goods and services. Instead of all of the conceptual value added contained in a product coming from the engineer or designer, there is now a move towards co-operation where front-line workers and consumers introduce what are often the most valuable, unique qualities. Diagram 1 depicts this evolution for the archetypal, mass-produced item - the automobile. At first, leaving the craft era for mass-production meant that the conceptual input per unit of output declined. Then as manufacturing techniques advanced it became possible to solicit the views of the consumer regarding a fixed set of options. In the future it is possible that the consumer will become a co-designer of their car. If this comes to pass it will mean that the long-standing distinctions between supply and demand, production and consumption are beginning to breakdown.

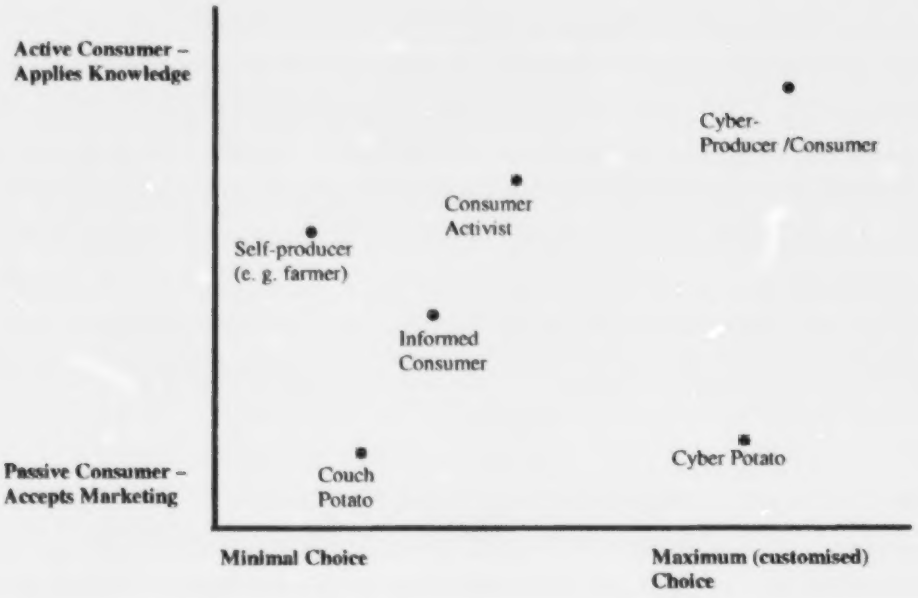
2.2.2. Integration of production and consumption

Not that such changes take place overnight. For instance, the diffusion of the attitudes, habits, managerial know-how and physical infrastructure – from shopping malls to highway systems – that characterise the mass-production, mass-consumption economy and society, spanned many decades and involved many profound changes. During this process the connection between the producer and consumer became ever more indirect, mediated by a long chain of designers, sub-contractors, wholesalers, distributors, marketers and merchants. Gradually, the consumer no longer initiated the production process like when they planted their own garden or knitted their own socks. Using the overwhelming force of lower prices for products of uniform quality, mass techniques first penetrated and then displaced prevailing and entrenched sources of supply, consumer relationships and even tastes.

As mass-production lowered the prices of good that were previously inaccessible or too costly consumers ended up making selections from the items on offer in a store or mail-order catalogue. Food and clothing made at home or by the local artisan were eventually replaced by products from a distant factory and distributed by supermarket chains and department stores. There is no reason to glorify the usually limited choices and often mediocre quality of many "home-grown, home-made" products and services. In addition, affordable mass-produced consumer goods and services have made a major contribution to improving living standards. Still, from the perspective of creative initiative the mass-era relieved individuals of responsibility. Most people no longer needed to know how to make what they wanted, they just bought what was available. And, as consumer safety and protection laws were gradually put in place, it also became reasonable to take product quality (or at least minimal safety) for granted. Consumers no longer needed to take responsibility nor accumulate the in-depth knowledge required for undertaking production or carefully assessing quality.

Diagram 2 offers one way of looking at the extent of choices and degrees of responsibility of the consumer. At one extreme, in the bottom left-hand corner of Diagram 2 is the passive consumer that makes few choices, and when they do tend to blindly follow the latest advertising campaign. At the other end of the spectrum, in the upper right-hand corner is the "cyber creator". This person goes beyond today's active consumer, who tries to be informed and make the best choice while still remaining fundamentally passive in accepting what is on offer. Instead, the "cyber creator" breaks with the current, dominant mass-consumption model by becoming a fundamental part of the production process.

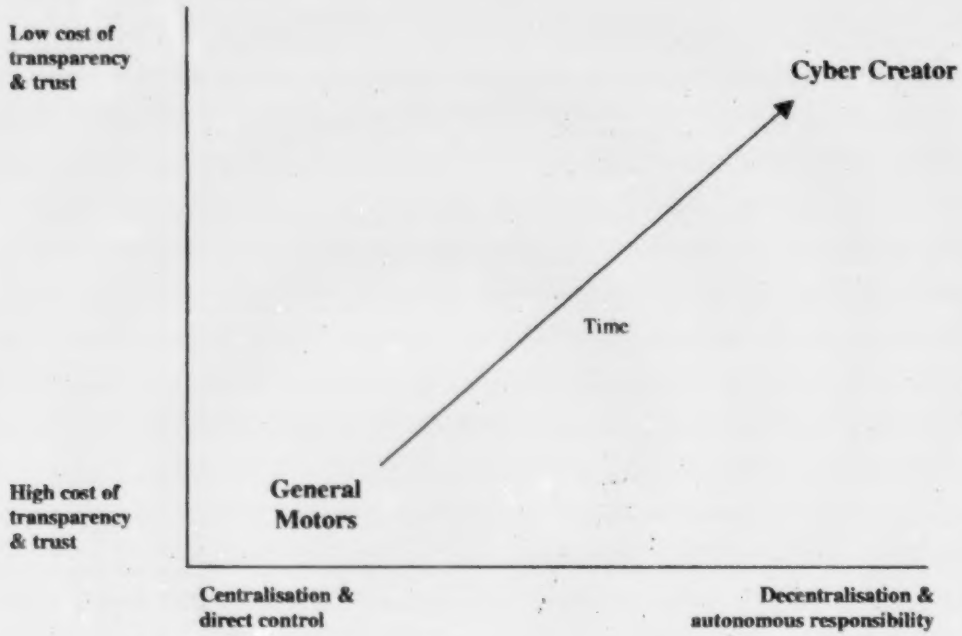
Diagram 2: Consumer Activism and Choice



The likelihood of moving from a society populated by "couch potatoes" towards one dominated by "cyber creators" does not, at first blush, seem to be as obvious as the shift that is already underway towards more knowledge intensive production. From today's vantage point it is difficult to imagine that the majority of people will get beyond equating choice with the chance to select what is in a catalogue, on a store shelf or pitched by advertising. Passivity and ignorance, bred by decades of mass-consumption, are deeply engrained in the behavioural and organisational patterns of daily life. Still, an impressive range of technological, economic and social forces are both creating the incentives and opening up the opportunities that might turn many more people into "cyber-creators".

Five main forces could, if working in combined harmony, be sufficient to surpass the mass-era's entrenched and fairly comfortable passivity and detachment from responsibility. First there are inherent human desires (be they minimalist or gluttonous) for goods and services that are tailored to a personal definition of high quality. Second, there is the race by suppliers to beat competitors by delivering individualised products. Third, the rich information flows required for such consumer and producer creativity are finally becoming affordable. Fourth, as depicted in Diagrams 3 and 4, the world of work is also under-going changes that are likely to enhance people's capacity to take initiative and responsibility. And finally, the fifth major factor helping to propel the "couch potato" off the sofa is a greater conscious and direct engagement with the surrounding world provoked by a wide range of important and often disturbing social changes, from new family formations and emerging community networks to greater awareness of cultural diversity and changed demographic structures (see the next sub-section).

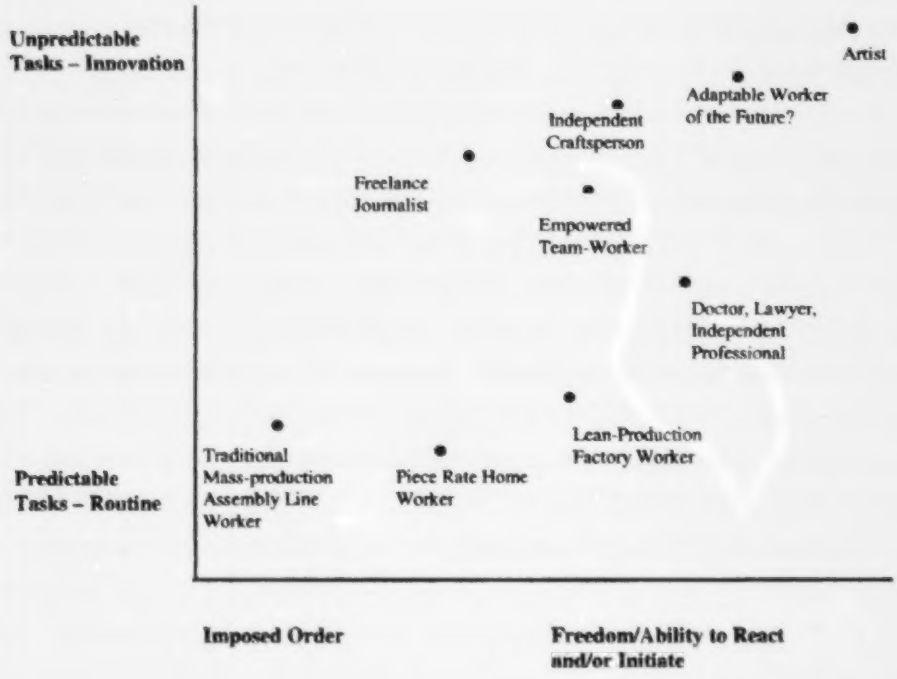
Diagram 3: The End of the Firm?



All of these trends are inter-dependent. For instance, as consumers manifest greater initiative and assume more responsibility, producers will also have to change – partly in response to demand side pull and partly because of the evolution of business models due to the push of competition and the pursuit of first-mover profits. From this perspective the firm, particularly in the organisational forms most prevalent today, is not necessarily a permanent fixture of economic life. Just as mass-production evolved, in part, from the impetus provided by waves of innovation in how firms were organised, financed and managed, so too will the learning economy and society.

Diagram 3, depicts what might happen over time if the economic advantages of producing within the organisational structure of today's familiar firm – due to the lower cost of sharing information and the greater ease of building trust –gives way to a production system dominated by cyber-creators. Along the way, workers will become much more independent. As Diagram 4 makes clear this means migrating away from the traditional assembly line jobs with predictable tasks and an imposed order towards the unpredictable freedom of the artist, even if the degree of original creativity is not at the same level. The transition from the lower-left to the upper-right quadrants of Diagrams 3 and 4 is an earthshaking break that leaves behind an economic and social order dominated by industrial age firms like General Motors to a new universe of decentralised and autonomous creators organised in many different ways.

Diagram 4: Adaptability, Work Task Predictability and Organisational Freedom



Making such a leap is far from a forgone conclusion. For one thing, establishing the degree of transparency and trust formerly found only within the protective boundaries of the firm will entail tremendous changes. Workers in firms, not unlike consumers accustomed to making choices from a supermarket's shelves, are generally used to and comfortable with the rules that limit their scope for independent initiative. This has largely come to be reassuring since the burden of decision making – along with the need to ascertain the accuracy and trustworthiness of needed information (be it product safety for the consumer or co-operation on the assembly line/office for the worker) – is minimised. Within the privileged space of a firm or store, usually facilitated through physical proximity and a common (tacit and explicit) culture, the cost of establishing transparency (information access) and trust (assessing/negotiating the degree of information accuracy) is significantly reduced. In part, the efficiency enhancing contribution of mass-production and consumption is derived from these lower costs. Furthermore, by narrowing the scope of decision making, the learning requirements for workers and consumers are also limited and hence there is a reduction in these related expenditures.

For most people, be it workers taking instructions about what and how to produce or consumers trusting that a vendor's product is safe, the institutions and culture of the mass-era considerably reduces the overall degree of responsibility and effort. In contrast, the full

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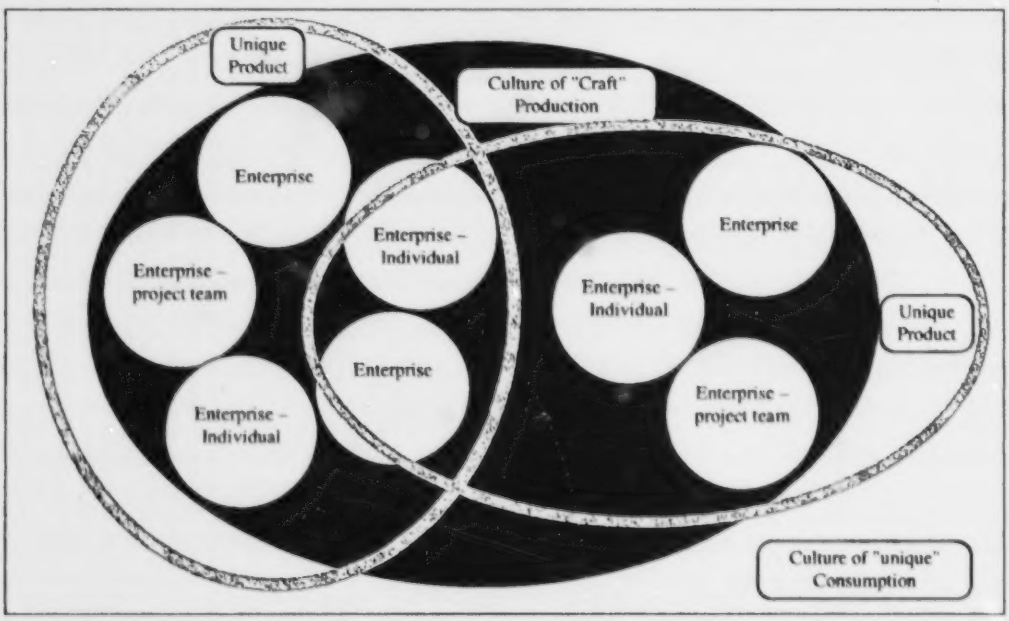
integration of production and consumption implies that each product or service is made specifically according to the unique requirements dictated by the individual. A person's shoes, clothes, house, grocery supplies, educational syllabus are all made to measure and according to their tastes. For workers and consumers the burden of gaining knowledge adequate for such tasks is shifted to the point where it is fair to describe this new condition as an entirely different culture from that of the mass-era. Diagram 5 sketches a world of unique products, conceived by the consumer and produced in co-operation with enterprises, be they individuals, teams or companies.

Diagram 5: Culture of Craft Production and Unique Consumption



The viability of such a world will hinge, in large part, on the ease with which consumers can develop their tastes and find dependable, skilled suppliers able to co-operate in the realisation of the desired output. Producers will also need inexpensive, accurate and trustworthy ways of signalling what they know how to do. In short, new ways of encouraging learning (human capital flows) and communicating what a person knows how to do (human capital stocks) will be crucial. This is really the learning economy – because learning becomes the fundamental activity. Learning that is not narrowly technocratic in today's sense of earning credentials or passing tests to become part of a meritocratic hierarchy, but from the perspective that learning is the foundation for creative action. On the demand side of the economy consumers learn continuously as they cultivate their tastes and seek ways to express them. On the supply side of the economy the notion of learning from one's customers takes on a whole new meaning as the production process becomes a joint effort to combine the technical knowledge of the producer with the creative ideas of the consumer.

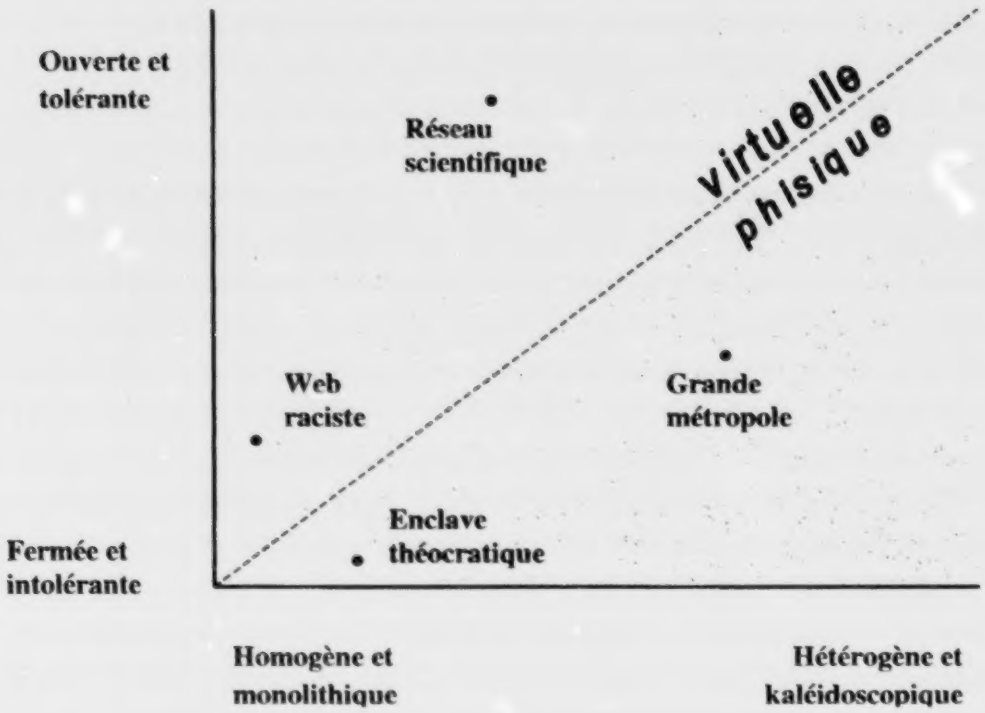
Such a cultural revolution in economic life will not happen overnight, nor will it occur without an equivalent transformation of the surrounding social tissue of laws, operational rules, customs, values and institutions. Just as the emergence of the mass-era was accompanied by a refashioning of the broader social fabric in OECD countries - universal suffrage, changing family structure, public social security, etc. - it is fair to expect that the advent of the learning society will also reshape the existing social landscape.

2.2.3. Transformation of Social Decision Making

In many parts of the world isolation, autonomy and homogeneous societies are giving way to inter-action, inter-dependence and social heterogeneity. A wide variety of factors are at work, from globe spanning television shows broadcast by satellite and expanding international air travel to the low cost of sharing information over the Internet and continuing tides of migration. Large segments of the world's population are now being exposed to ideas, cultures, goods, services and people that in the past were either unknown or inaccessible. Horizons are being broadened at the same time as many established and dearly cherished perceptions are being shattered. Long-standing definitions of social status, identity and authority are being challenged, often without any convincing or practical replacements. Despite the backlashes and fear that such changes provoke, the overall trend - driven largely by economic pragmatism - seems so far to be towards greater tolerance and openness.

Diagram 6 sketches two dimensions of this changing social tapestry. On the horizontal axis is the degree of ethnic, linguistic or cultural diversity - from homogeneous and monolithic on the left to heterogeneous and kaleidoscopic on the right. The vertical axis tracks a basic social attitude - the extent to which people are open and tolerant of others and new ideas - from closed and intolerant on the bottom to open and tolerant at the top. This set space is divided, although not exclusively, between two types of community - one physical and the other the just emerging virtual worlds of cyberspace. On the physical side, for instance, many major cities of the world demonstrate that people from a large number of distinct backgrounds, outlooks and credos can mostly live and learn together. While on the virtual, Internet side it is all too easy to find examples of all kinds of communities, including racist ones composed of individuals that are physically scattered across the planet but closely joined in their intolerance of people of a different race. Without being at all exhaustive, Diagram 6 illustrates the vast range of potential outcomes that may result from the upheaval taking place in both the social composition of society and its attitudes or values.

Diagram 6: Social Composition, Openness and Tolerance - Virtual and Physical

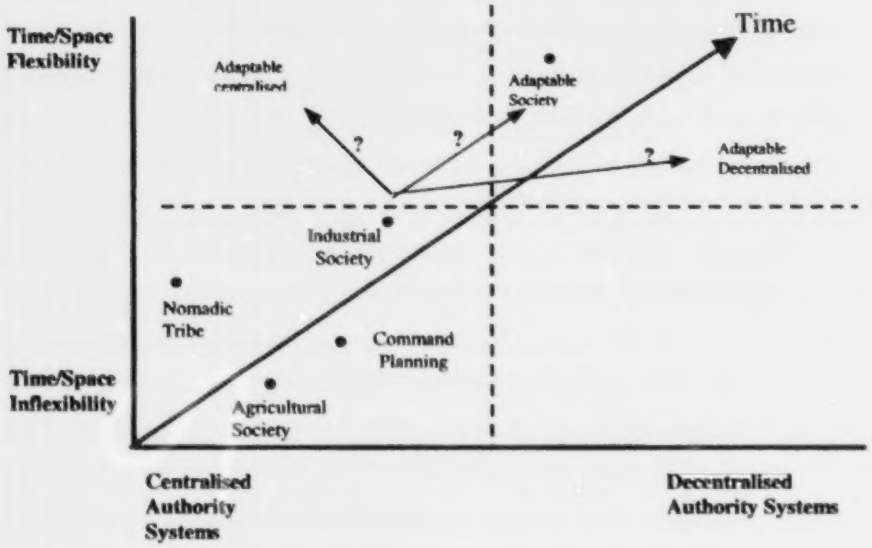


Which tendencies will dominate remains to be seen. One set of influential drivers that might end up encouraging greater openness and acceptance of diversity involves the previously discussed trends towards more knowledge intensive production and an eventual fusion of demand and supply. Such changes are almost certain to be combined with significant technological advances that facilitate contact and exchange at all levels of society – from the local to the global. This profusion of inter-connectedness is likely to coexist, even complement the accumulation of inter-dependencies. Strong forms of mutual dependency are relatively inescapable aspects of a more elaborate economic division of labour (again, both locally and globally) and the reality of our common ecological fate on a small planet. Isolation or withdrawal from open commerce, unconstrained inter-relationships and planet wide co-operation looks to be a poor and ineffectual alternative. Autarky is unlikely to attract people away from either the productivity gains that arise from specialisation and exchange or the obligation to work together when dealing with environmental issues like climate change that cross borders and political dividing lines without asking permission.

A world that is both more inter-connected and inter-dependent, in ways that are measurable and recognised by most people, may also encourage a flourishing of organisational models and responsibility/authority systems. Diagram 7 explores these options in terms of the degree of time/space flexibility and the extent to which authority or decision making power is decentralised. Perhaps most straightforward is the relationship between time/space flexibility

and inter-connection/inter-dependence. It may seem slightly mundane, but surviving off the land or even punching the clock at the factory gate leaves little room for flexibility in when and where one works and lives. Industrial societies make up for this time/space rigidity by having relatively open labour markets that introduce flexibility through job-turnover. In the future it is conceivable that an increasingly intricate division of labour and efficient telecommunications will make it feasible for people to work and live when and where ever - without being forced to give up their work or community relationships. Around the clock and around the world the availability of creative collaborators and trusted communities could create an unprecedented degree of time/space flexibility in people's daily lives. In this future, individuals will be able to choose when and where to work and live without the coercion or limits imposed today by the lingering habits and rules of the mass-era.

Diagram 7: Time/Space Flexibility and Decentralisation



As for authority systems, there seems to a basic historical undercurrent that leads to the erosion of centralised, autocratic power - be it in the home, at work or in society at large. In many ways the changes wrought in this century in the name of democracy, feminism and religious freedom have been very dramatic. For large parts of humanity the arbitrary and absolute rule of father, husband, cleric, boss, lord or politician has been significantly reduced. What the future holds is of course uncertain, but long-standing aspirations for enhanced liberty could combine with the evolution of greater individual economic autonomy to encourage an even greater dispersion of power across all parts of society. Individual self-determination, not just as a consumer or producer, might take on new meaning as children, spouses, workers and citizens gain (or have thrust upon them) more rights, responsibilities and choices. How a society with such radically decentralised authority systems will be able to

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function may seem somewhat difficult to fathom. No doubt the same perplexity has often plagued parents faced with their child's demands for independence and chieftains confronting democratic rebellion. What is fairly certain is that the capacity to grasp and effectively exercise personal responsibility depends largely on the ease with which one can learn. In this sense decentralised authority systems and the learning society go hand in hand.

Moving to states of permanent self-discovery, as a consumer/producer, and of individual responsibility/engagement, as a citizen of planet earth, considerably transcends current practices and capabilities. From today's perspective, individuals and institutions seem ill equipped to carry the burden of creativity and self-direction that would characterise everyday life in the upper-right-hand reaches of Diagram 7. The knowledge requirements for continuous decision making and initiative in every dimension of daily life seem implausibly heavy for such a society to be feasible. Still, before we jettison these future options as impractical, it is worth remembering that foresight depends heavily on hindsight. Meaning, it was regularly the case that major socio-economic change looked to be well beyond basic individual and institutional capabilities until it happened.

Take, for example, the introduction of compulsory schooling along with the shift of the majority of people to cities and non-agricultural employment. Over the years entire populations that had paced life by the sun and seasons with knowledge handed on directly from one family member to the next shifted to an existence regimented by the clock and structured preponderantly by the behavioural and cognitive goals inculcated by mass school systems. Taking this comparative vantage point, life at the beginning of the 21st Century could be characterised as vastly more complex than at the turn of the 20th. Only, for the most part, the tools of survival - like literacy, common codes of conduct, telecommunications, government, etc. - have kept pace. So, even though the 19th Century farmer might arguably be like a fish out of water in today's hurly-burly city, most people born and bred to these times manage to make it through the day with probably almost the same degree of equanimity as their ancestors. Leaving aside the perennial hubris of the "now", which so often insists that the present era is the most complicated, rapidly and radically changing, etc., it might be possible that as the world around us changes so too does our capacity to handle it. Thus, if history is a guide, there may be a path - more or less bumpy - that takes us from the still relatively passive societies of the mass-era to more activist learning societies of the future.

Getting there will no doubt be a complex and protracted process. There is even a chance that along the way people will choose to go in another direction or to slow the pace and nature of change so that the world remains more or less like it is now. However, if the forces that foster the learning economy and society prevail there is a good chance that one of the primary building blocks will involve improving the transparency of human capital. Transparency depends largely on better – easily understood, trusted, inexpensive – measurement of what people know.

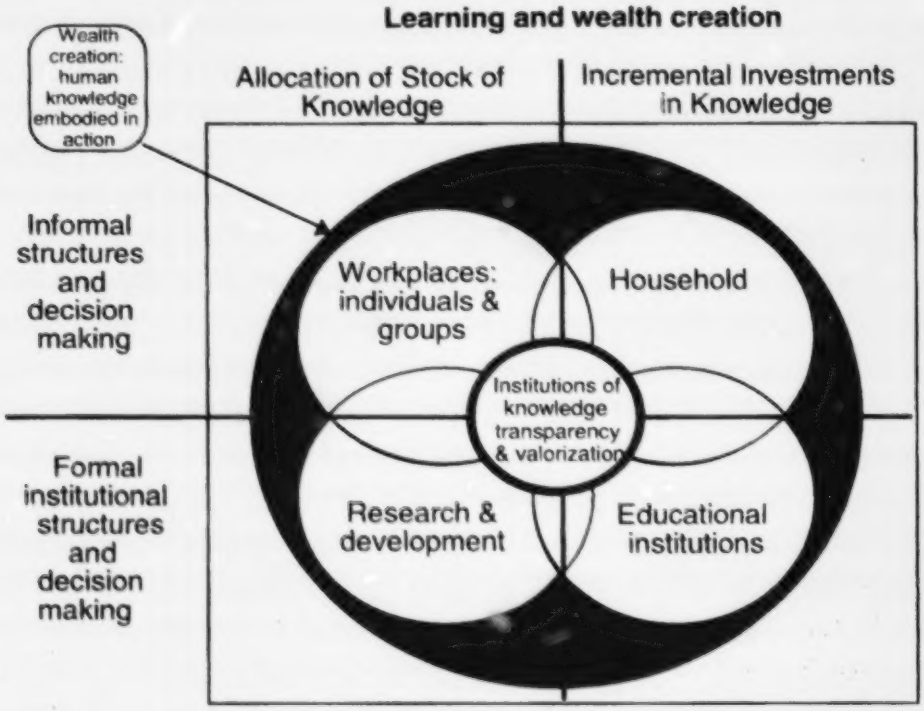
2.3. Conclusion: Towards human capital transparency

Every era has had its methods for revealing what people know how to do. For a long time fine gradations for distinguishing different types and degrees of competency were not particularly important. Titles or designations of social status were generally adequate, if inexact proxies for a person's competencies – knights knew how to fight, priests gave last rights, guildmasters knew their craft. Mostly in this century, certificates from educational institutions became the signal of choice, indicating a certain minimum capacity in a particular field. A high school diploma came to mean that the person would probably show up on time for work and could usually be expected to be able to read and calculate at a basic level. In the regulated and certified professions, when someone hung out a shingle as a doctor or lawyer it was fair to assume they had the basic skills required by the guild. Up until recently these rather vague, usually input related (years at school, prestige of university) indicators were adequate for getting a job and guiding people's investments in their human capital. In any case, there was not much choice. The most readily recognised signals of acquired human capital were (and are still) based fairly exclusively on successful completion of compulsory schooling. This suited the mass-era just fine.

A learning economy and society will need to go much further. Perhaps the biggest break from current practices is likely to be the shift to measuring what people know regardless of how they acquired their competencies. This is a radical step that puts the school of hard knocks potentially on par with Harvard, it also means that entrepreneurs whose first ventures have a high probability of failing can still bank the assets of their learning through recognition of their arduously acquired competencies. Such "compensation" for investing in learning has a good chance of finally creating the incentives that might make the so far unsuccessfully pursued goal of broad participation in life-long learning a reality. Additionally, a much more refined and supple way of measuring what people know could significantly improve the allocative choices made by individuals, co-workers, and employers looking either to make new investments in human capital or make better use of existing knowledge assets. Diagram 8 depicts these relationships in terms of the sources, uses and assessment mechanisms of what people know - all in relation to the creation of wealth.

At the moment, at least in most OECD countries, the overwhelming emphasis is on what happens in the lower right quadrant of Diagram 8. The sources of learning that are given pride of place are those of educational institutions. Experience and other ways of acquiring competencies are not paid much attention nor offered significant official credit. As for the centre of the diagram, the institutions of knowledge transparency and valorisation of today are also strongly biased towards formal educational institutions that have the state sanctioned right to certify "educational achievement". This is a jealously guarded power of immense economic and social importance. Allocation of the stock of human capital and the incremental investments that constitute the flow of knowledge acquisition are deeply influenced by this signalling system and its associated incentives and disincentives.

Diagram 8: Learning and Wealth Creation


Learning and wealth creation
Wealth creation: human knowledge embodied in action
Allocation of Stock of Knowledge
Incremental Investments in Knowledge
Informal structures and decision making
Workplaces: individuals & groups
Household
Institutions of knowledge transparency & valorization
Formal institutional structures and decision making
Research & development
Educational institutions

A learning economy and society will need to take a much more open, efficient and refined approach to the recognition of what people know – regardless of the source. Otherwise it will probably be impossible to achieve the requisite intensity of continuous learning. Decisions concerning both incremental investments and the allocation of existing human capital assets will need to become significantly easier and more efficient than today. Indeed, it is not farfetched to expect that the feasibility of any social orders where learning is the central activity hinges on establishing very high degrees of transparency regarding what people know how to do. Such transparency is perhaps the key enabling element for a major shift towards knowledge intensive production, the full integration of supply and demand, the general diffusion of constant creative initiative, and the leap in social engagement and responsibility essential for the functioning of an entirely flexible and decentralised social order.

No doubt, establishing such full transparency with respect to a person's competencies will involve many changes and innovations to existing expectations and institutions. Building up highly neutral, flexible, diversified and efficient systems of prior learning assessment will depend on the development of the appropriate norms, rules, organisations and relationships. All of which are likely to differ according to local, national and regional traditions. No one model or method will fit all circumstances. Indeed, there is already an impressive range of initiatives underway. Unfortunately, most of the current attempts to recognise and validate what people know tend to be go-it-alone programs run by one constituency or another – firms

or school boards, universities or professional bodies. As a result these efforts are fragmented and often isolated to the point where there is no choice but to go through the expensive process of reinventing the assessment methods and/or categories each time. Furthermore, most efforts use competency assessment measuring sticks drawn from, at best, recent employment and educational categories. Referencing human capital to mostly mass-era jobs and credentials (even those in the service sector) poses two major problems.

First, measuring what people know using yesterday's yardsticks is too rigid and narrow. Think of it in terms of the difference between two types of Internet search engines such as Yahoo and Alta Vista. With Yahoo there are pre-set categories which, even if up-to-date, still offer a relatively rigid division of the world into a few subject headings. Alta Vista, or any one of the full text search engines, offers an open ended way of finding the exact bit of information that you are looking for using the words that correspond to your specific request. Both are useful, depending on your needs and preferred search strategy. Similarly, a learning economy and society that depends on the ease with which creative, free-form associations can be made will need signals for what people know that are up-to-date and open ended. Here a patent office model might be an instructive precedent.

Only, and this is the second problem, innovations in this field are strictly constrained by vested interests. Consider the four most obvious constituencies: Individuals naturally want to see their skills portrayed in the best light. Teachers and the organisations to which they may belong want to see that their pupils receive the most recognition. Employers – be they traditional firms or the joint producers of integrated supply and demand – have a clear interest in paying only for the minimum qualifications needed to complete a particular task. Governments hope to ensure that there is adequate investment in the skills which may be generally beneficial to the public good, beyond what individuals or organisations might finance on the basis of their narrower interests. With each of these constituencies pursuing a distinct and often opposing agenda it is no wonder progress has been slow. Considerable inventiveness and political perseverance will be required to actually introduce and widely diffuse the social and institutional enablers that will make it possible to accurately, inexpensively and accessibly assess what someone knows how to do.

Despite the difficulties, the needs of the learning economy and society are driving human capital transparency systems forward. Better ways of validating individual's unique skill mixes and track records are springing up all over the place. Individuals are seeking to be assessed so they can capitalise on what they know. Firms are trying to upgrade and improve the allocation of worker's skills. Educational suppliers, often responding to competitive pressures, are beginning to offer credit for knowledge acquired outside their institution. And, the public sector is redoubling efforts to validate and motivate learning throughout society. As a result, it is easier today to measure what people know than it was in the past. Still, many obstacles remain to be overcome, particularly if the aim is to realise the degree of human capital transparency envisioned over the previous pages.

Daunting as the requirements of a learning society may seem, it is worth keeping in mind precedents like the development of compulsory schooling or the introduction of patent systems. Over a century ago imagining the functioning and benefits of universal education or legal mechanisms for owning intellectual property required an assessment of both plausible long-run trends and desirable goals for the future. Answering the question - why measure human capital - demands a similar willingness to examine people's aspirations against the background of what may be feasible a generation or two from now.

3. Mobility and social cohesion

Éric Fries Guggenheim

An odd title for an Agora on the identification, assessment and recognition of informal learning! The title makes no mention of informal learning, its evaluation or recognition. And yet recognition of achievement is at the heart of the debate: it is the key to restoring social cohesion, threatened by short-term flexibility, by developing a personal, social and occupational mobility that promotes true recurrent training. This is what we would like to demonstrate here.

3.1. Social cohesion under threat

At a time when distances are shrinking due to the ever greater speed of transport and personal contact is becoming ever closer due to the explosion in information and communication technologies, the divides between social groups are widening. Up to the late 1960s, in conditions of general growth, there were few problems in obtaining access to work, and every group could be assured of a share of added value in return for their involvement in economic activities. From the early 1970s, however, changes in production and in the exchange of goods and services led to great disparities among social groups in terms of accessing gross domestic product and sharing added value.

The opening up of markets for goods and services, and later of financial markets, led us to a period of instability and disruption, in which employers had to make constant efforts to adapt. Employers, however, live very much in the present and rarely take the long-term view. In conditions of steady growth they may allow themselves to plan for the medium and longer term, develop a more collective view of their role in social organisation and take into account the social aspects of work on the basis of socio-economic indicators. In this case, work is seen as a resource to be made the most of. When the economic situation is at lower ebb, however, they focus on the only indicator recognised by free trade and open competition - the rate of profit. Labour is then regarded as a cost.

Over the last quarter of the 20th century, the portion of added value represented by wages has steadily declined. The quest for efficiency and productivity has led to constant efforts to reduce labour costs and lay off surplus personnel. This form of workforce management is called "flexible employment". Bernard Bruhnes ([13]), among other writers, distinguishes five types of such management: *externally quantitative* (redundancy, recruitment), *internally quantitative* (working hours – half-time, part-time), *functional* (variation in the pace of work,

([13]) Bernard, Brunhes; Jacques, Rojot; Wolfram, Wassermann. *La flexibilité du marché du travail: Nouvelles tendances dans l'entreprise*. Paris: OECD, 1989.

breakdown of the working day into several hourly increments, multiskilling), *externalisation* (fixed-term contracts, temporary contracts), and *pay flexibility* (profit-sharing, individualised wage levels).

3.1.1. Microeconomic effects

Flexible employment is a concept relating to the microeconomic behaviour of the enterprise. The enterprise decides to dismiss, hire and resort to temporary labour. As a general rule, flexibility is imposed on and passively accepted by the workforce, in the name of an inevitable and indisputable economic logic.

Yet such short-term measures, though in some cases used as a last resort (e.g. by employers faced with dwindling order books), are always painful and costly to the employer. In today's Western economies, laying off personnel always costs money (redundancy payments); if later on business revives and new workers have to be recruited, this also has its cost. It is expensive to seek personnel, and the employer never knows the extent to which a new worker will be involved in his or her work.

But there is another, heavier cost to be borne, one which relates to the involvement of the workforce still employed in the enterprise. An employer known for coping with short-term problems by making people redundant cannot expect much commitment from his workforce. All in all, recourse to the external market has a high cost and the employer needs to think twice before resorting to it.

Tapping the external labour market may of course have the advantage of bringing in younger, more recently trained workers, who find it easier to adapt to new technology. In some cases recruitment grants may even be available. Quite apart from the fact that an employer cannot expect the loyalty of qualified employees with higher levels of diplomas unless he or she offers them genuine prospects of advancement, problems may arise in day-to-day practice for other staff members – those who have fewer diplomas and qualifications but are more familiar with the actual job to be done. It is never worth disrupting an establishment's age pyramid.

One cannot shed all the competent, experienced members of the workforce. But newcomers deprive older workers of the prospects of advancement to which the latter rightly feel entitled. For their part, young people entering the company find that their career prospects are limited, if, as is common, they have been taken on for jobs with a short-term outlook. This is a no-win game for everyone, starting with the employer.

Early retirement raises a similar problem. Obviously it offers younger employees fresh opportunities for promotion, but it disrupts the balance of the age pyramid. After a few over-rapid promotions, career advancement may come to a dead end. Furthermore, early retirement deprives the enterprise of the experience and skills of older employees. Their value should be gauged less by their hourly productivity – which admittedly may be on the decline – than by the quality of their interactions with colleagues (and these are ever more crucial as production processes diverge more and more from the Taylor model), their ability to train younger

colleagues, their flair for detecting problems and especially their ability to anticipate potential problems.

Over the past few years, in order to avoid the repeated redundancy and rehiring costs entailed by such policies of surplus staff management there has been wide-scale recourse to temporary employment. In France, in 1994, 70% of recruitment concerned temporary posts. Stable employees now account for only 55% of the active population, compared with 76% in 1970.

Admittedly, temporary jobs occasionally have advantages for employees, too. Fixed-term contracts may operate as a sort of antechamber, allowing employers to screen people before they are recruited on long-term contracts; they may also offer an opportunity to less qualified members of the active population, who experience difficulty in finding a job, to display their skills and qualities. Some people may in fact use a temporary job as a breathing space, in which they enjoy a measure of freedom and which allows them to push up bids from potential employers. Nevertheless, temporary jobs reinforce the division of the labour market into two areas that are separate in terms of pay, workplace integration and work-linked social rights (the rights to training, profit-sharing and benefits in kind).

Although the creation of a second labour market and the greater flexibility of employment may, in some cases, benefit employers, by lowering wage expenses, raising profitability and allowing for greater flexibility in dealing with the demand for products, these options are not without their unwanted side effects. Within an enterprise, practices such as redundancy, conversion to temporary staff and losses through early retirement may entail certain costs to the employer. Personnel management does not usually take such costs sufficiently into account.

Be that as it may, the true costs doubtless arise elsewhere. Taylor-style flexibility - short-term flexibility - in reaction to variations in the volume of work has serious macroeconomic and above all social effects.

3.1.2. Macroeconomic and social effects

If a growing proportion of the active population is out of work, and if there is greater general instability of employment and increased emphasis on part-time work, then consumer standards tend to fall and global demand to weaken. In periods of crisis, consumption is of the wait-and-see type. Households fall back on essentials and ultimately take refuge in generic products, seeking out the lowest prices as best they can. The same behaviour is exhibited by enterprises when procuring spares and components for their own production. This tends to reduce the volume of global demand and, above all, to divert demand towards lower-quality, often imported, products -- especially from low-pay countries where workers enjoy little social protection. Consumption of domestic products falls because of the precautionary accumulation of savings and the re-channelling of an increased portion of demand to foreign-made products. This can only reduce the demand directed to domestic producers, who see this as a confirmation that they have been right to cut back their workforce and make employment

more flexible. This is what creates the vicious circle characteristic of our economies. For example, in France the uncontrolled development of hypermarkets and the concentration of retail trade among a handful of very large buyers undoubtedly work against national employment. In the name of defending household income and the purchasing power of families, national employment is sacrificed, which further reduces the earnings coming into households. France is now exporting this system to Spain, Portugal and Greece.

The full force of the cumulative employment crisis tends to be felt by the less skilled workers and employees on the secondary market. It also results - in countries such as ours where substantial social rights were won in times of growth - in an excessively high cost of unskilled labour.

Rising unemployment and over-systematic use of partial unemployment by certain large enterprises, that have adopted this as a "customary" method of personnel management (contrary to the spirit of the measure) lead to a reduction in the social contributions received by unemployment insurance bodies while adding to their disbursements. This inevitably leads to adjustments in social security levies. Where those levies are essentially based on wages, as is the case in France, the result is an increase in the cost of labour. Placing ceilings on social security contributions, as is often the case, leads to higher taxation for unskilled work compared to skilled work. This reinforces the exclusion from employment of a whole category of the active population, condemning it to a second-tier labour market or to social welfare, and reinforcing the vicious circle of unemployment already described.

But it is on the social level that the effects of short-term employment management are most serious. They are of three kinds:

(a) radical deskilling of a sizeable portion of the active population ;

(b) the disruption of patterns of value and attitudes;

(c) a rise in antisocial and delinquent behaviour.

In most of our countries a division of tasks has been created between the school system and the workplace. The school system provides general education – the three Rs and technology – and in some cases preliminary vocational training. It also promotes socialisation outside the family, contributing further to individual development. School concentrates on cognitive and social skills. The workplace, on the other hand, imparts skills to employees – technicians, blue-collar workers and office staff – and concentrates on occupational competences. In many cases, we can also observe a division of tasks between large and small workplaces, with small concerns serving as training places for youths who have derived the least advantage from compulsory schooling and larger concerns offering school-leavers a higher standard of education and training than their first jobs, or giving the chance of promotion to people who have acquired their skills in the smaller concerns.

As employers cut back to a hard core of skilled and more highly trained workers, unemployment becomes concentrated among young people of low educational attainment. As a result, the opportunities formerly available to those young people to acquire skills through

working in an enterprise are vanishing. It is thus becoming harder to train these young school dropouts. As demonstrated by Arthur Schneeberger here, at a previous Agora ([14]), even in those countries where vocational training has followed the pattern of the dual system (alternating training and employment), employers now tend to recruit apprentices who exhibit the kind of cognitive and social skills not possessed by school dropouts. It is true that a whole armoury of measures has been set up to counteract this trend and to encourage employers to take on youngsters of low educational attainment. Even so, the hard core of those excluded from employment is expanding because of this deskilling phenomenon. However, today's youngsters are tomorrow's adults, tomorrow's 29-46-year-olds. In other words – and this is undoubtedly the most serious concern – older people, those who could take young people in hand, those who share the same social origins and background, will very soon have disappeared from enterprises.

Regarding value and behaviour systems, we are facing a twofold phenomenon: the general establishment of a welfare society and, in parallel, a dilution or even the disappearance of old forms of solidarity.

The difficulties faced by young people in finding employment (twenty years ago 70% of 20-year-olds had jobs, compared with today's 30%) are making them more dependent on their families. The financial burden on middle and lower class households, whose children often continue in school for want of an alternative, is increasingly heavy. For those youngsters who do not even have this support, all they can count on at best is an arsenal of welfare measures enabling them to exist. A very real problem then arises concerning youth autonomy and youth emancipation, how youngsters can take control of their futures, and more simply the issue of young people's access to citizenship and to a sense of taking part in a collective effort and common destiny.

As far as the traditional forms of solidarity are concerned, we can only record their slow dissolution. Though unemployment may not be the cause of the break-up of the family, it aggravates the consequences. Instability has considerable effects on families' standard of living and puts them at risk of social exclusion. Losing the income of a single parent is far more serious than losing the income of one of two working parents. Family instability, moreover, detracts from the equilibrium of parents and children and the slightest destabilisation, especially in working life, may lead to conflict, break-up, divorce, unpaid alimony, etc., while social relations play a shrinking role in resolving such tensions. Isolation is spreading. More than one in ten member of the active population lives alone. This is

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([14]) Arthur Schneeberger, The concept of a Minimum Learning Platform, Educational contents and methods for improving the low-skilled. In: Agora IV – The low-skilled on the European labour market: prospects and policy options. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000. (Cedefop Panorama series, 5097). Available from Internet: http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/etv/publication/download/panorama/5097_en.pdf [cited 21.7.2002]

These changes are analysed in details in Lorenz, Lassnigg; Arthur, Schneeberger: Transition from Initial Education to Working Life. OECD-Country Background Report: Austria, Research report commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Vienna, July 1997, pp.10 et seq. and 18 et seq.

particularly common among older members, and questions may arise as to the consequences of the spread of early retirement, the rise in female unemployment, etc., on the lives of such people, for whom work remains the preferred place of social relationships. The disappearance of solidarity itself is encouraged by the influence of ideologies that are against compulsory contributions and by the current trends towards a society based more on insurance than on solidarity ([15]). Although welfare support undoubtedly does not have great social advantages its disappearance is a serious matter in that it sanctions exclusion and often makes it irreversible.

This is no doubt the most serious danger the spread of short-term management and greater flexibility of employment poses to our social structure. Exclusion from employment and solidarity measures (health, substitute earnings, etc.), and exclusion from training lead young people, the marginalised, certain second or third immigrants - who half a century ago would have been assimilated in a single generation - to take refuge in ghettos and create their own sub-cultures. This is their way of finding alternative means of solidarity and alternative ways of securing income and accessing the consumer patterns of the "other half of society", which they see reflected in the mirror of television. An alternative society, living at first in the margins of our own, starts drawing up its own rules and codes. Taking advantage of the blind alleys of mainstream society and resorting to petty crime (thieving, receiving stolen goods, etc,), drug-dealing, prostitution and so on, this counter-culture ultimately preys on society and may, if we are not careful, ultimately destroy its roots. A lack of prospects and growing rancour are feeding a spirit of revenge among a sizeable portion of our society, generating violence and delinquency which exact a major social and economic toll. One only has only to observe how far violence and insecurity affect an economy as prosperous and as technologically advanced as that of the US. One merely needs to look at how the development of Latin American societies (although Argentina made good headway during the interwar period, as did Brazil and Chile after the World War II and Venezuela after 1958) has collapsed under the weight of extreme social divisions and the poverty and violence they have generated.

How can all this be overcome? How can we reconcile the need to adapt to radical changes in production and consumer patterns as the millennium draws to a close? How can we withstand the shock created by the pace of globalisation, which the dominant liberal ideology has imposed, while reducing the social gap that threatens our way of life and restoring social cohesion?

In fact there is no miracle solution. Restoring social cohesion will require long-term efforts affecting our patterns of collective behaviour and involving the co-operation of every socio-economic actor. What is needed is to create the conditions in which every member of society can once again have prospects and look forward to a future. This will not be achieved by dismantling the system of social protection or by doing away with minimum wages or deregulating the labour market. Nor will it be done by taking away the powers of the State or

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([15]) Fragonard, Bertrand; et al. Rapport de la commission du Commissariat Général au Plan sur *Cohésion sociale et prévention de l'Exclusion*. Paris: La Documentation Française, 1993

by encouraging tougher competition. Indeed, precisely the opposite is true. As Jean-Paul Fitoussi says, "*equity [must] not be a secondary concern, a dressing for the wounds created by the circumstances; [it is] the very prerequisite of effectiveness* ([16]). Change is necessary and adaptation to outside constraints unavoidable; but it must not be the result of forced flexibility imposed from without. Instead, it should the result of mobility, chosen freely by workers who possess the necessary skills and can be confident that such a move does not represent a demotion.

3.2. Mobility as a source of social cohesion

Mobility is at the opposite extreme of flexibility. Of course it implies a change of job, employer, workplace and/or residence, just as flexibility does; but while flexibility is imposed on working people, mobility is freely consented to, even desired and sought after.

Mobility may occur inside or outside the enterprise. Horizontal internal mobility corresponds to a move to a department or job at an equivalent level of responsibility and/or pay; vertical internal mobility involves a higher level of responsibility, with or without a rise in pay.

Mobility outside the enterprise reflects a desire to earn a promotion or embark on a career that the previous employer could not or would not grant. It may also amount to forestalling the risk of losing one's job, or to a desire to live in a different place, work with different people or expand one's horizons.

A talent for mobility is a virtue in an economic system such as ours, which is in a constant state of flux. Mobility is in fact a source of mutual enrichment. For the enterprise, it brings in a newcomer who will no doubt take a more critical and objective view of the enterprise than existing staff; the new arrival is a source of diversity and enriches the concern's practices and experience. For the person taking advantage of such opportunities, mobility represents a chance to acquire further experience and new skills. It also leads to socio-cultural intermingling which promotes the greater homogeneity of the group concerned i.e. the creation of a workplace culture and the strengthening of a sense of belonging to a group, a collective. Mobility at the individual's own initiative also has positive effects on the group, as the latter gains a larger perspective and enhanced cohesion.

It is also rare for mobility not to be linked to material advantage (greater responsibility, higher pay) or other benefits (more interesting work, greater autonomy). It is therefore a source of motivation and makes for a more dynamic personnel.

However, mobility needs to be prepared and created. The methods of production and organisation of labour which characterise the turn of the century have the greatest interest in

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([16]) Fitoussi, Jean-Paul. *Compétitivité et cohésion sociale*. Lettre de l'OFCE n°°133. Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po, 1994.

developing autonomy, adaptability, team spirit and co-operation; but this calls on employees, employers and society at large to develop skills and qualities that have so far been undervalued.

If employees are to be autonomous, we must have confidence in their skills, their ability to adapt, their capacity to deal with contingencies. This presupposes a general standard of familiarity with the production process permitting a person to see things in perspective and genuinely to anticipate difficulties. As Fourastié notably suggested, "*la gestion de la panne*" (forward management) has succeeded "*la gestion de la peine*" (management of manual work). This makes just as much call on "socio-relational behaviours", as Y. Lichtenberger ([17]) calls them, "where the keywords are incentive, responsibility, adaptability", as on technical or technological knowledge. These skills, however, are usually drawn from individuals' pathways: the situations they have experienced, the tests to which they have been put and the relationships they have created.

This points to a style of personnel management that is the opposite of short-term; one that is based on placing people in a working situation and offering them access to continuing training (including general and cultural education as well as training leading to diplomas), clear-cut career prospects, a good workplace environment, good relationships and communication within the enterprise.

Multiskilling and adaptability have a cost, measured in terms of the effort to integrate employees and to negotiate relationships within the enterprise; they possibly also incur additional pay costs (efficiency wage). The advantage they offer is that they make plain the full range of employee's qualities: inventiveness, flexibility, personal commitment and so on.

Mobility – that is, flexibility, adaptability, curiosity, multiskilling, etc. – can meet qualitative changes in demand for new variety and quality requirements as well as the quantitative fluctuation of demand. All these competences and skills help to reduce the unit cost of products, which now tend to be produced in short batches – a far cry from the mass production of past Taylor/Ford styles of manufacturing. They help make quality reliable by ensuring that people understand and respect procedures rather than just learn simple production mechanisms.

A type of personnel management that promotes internal mobility makes it possible for the enterprise to adapt to market shifts and ongoing technological change by drawing solely on internal resources, without having to rebuild the work collective. Using this internal market also enhances the standing of employees, offering them pathways to work success and sometimes even personal success (with training leading to qualifications). This stimulates their productivity and causes others to emulate them. In addition, it encourages employees to train themselves, not just at work but also outside working hours (a positive factor, in that the

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([17]) Lichtenberger, Yves. Ressources humaines, formation et qualification: renouveler les approches. In: Coriat, Benjamin; Taddéi, Dominique (eds.), *Entreprise France, Made in France 2*. Le Livre de Poche, 1993.

borderlines between work and non-work are becoming blurred). This allows for the forward management of employment.

This is not true just of the more qualified employees. We would recommend on this subject the *Initiative-Emploi* insert to *Le Monde* of 13 September 1995 ([18]). In among all the doom-and-gloom articles in this supplement, describing the doubts and blues of 50-year-old executives now facing flexible management, there is a short article by Marie-Claude Betheder describing a large company's policy for integrating unskilled personnel. She recounts that "women sorters and packers, workers who have specialised in operating certain machines, and who were at threat of losing their jobs" have been trained to operate digital command machines. These workers included cleaners and women close to retirement age. According to the personnel manager, they now know not just how to operate such machines but even how to programme them.

This called for an undeniable effort on the part of the company, but also on the part of the workers. The implication is that the job must have a "sound basis". People cannot be constantly asked to move ahead, to stop doing what they have been doing and launch on whatever other functions the company needs, unless they can be sure of keeping their jobs. In fact, as Jean Bué ([19]) writes, "flexibility in personnel management is incompatible with the flexibility of employment: it is hard to reconcile temporary jobs with autonomy at work". Instability and mobility fit uneasily together.

Mobility also comes at a cost for the employee. As clearly shown by Valérie Aquain, Michel Cézard, Alain Charraud and Lydie Vinck in an excellent article in *Travail et Emploi* ([20]), it has to be paid for. Increased autonomy, greater versatility and the introduction of new technologies offer advantages, but also impose additional burdens. For example, new technology adds to the mental burden associated with work. As it calls for greater vigilance, one must be in a constant state of alert to concentrate on selected sources of information and cope with several problems at once. The reactions generated are tension and anxiety, though at the same time growing skills enhance one's image of work and one's self-esteem. In short, mobility is not a free ride for employees ([21]). It calls for effort, but effort in the higher sense of the word - not a cut in one's purchasing power by a certain percentage of extra VAT, nor an increase in the patient's contribution towards medical treatment, but a positive effort for the collective, i.e. the company. In the final analysis it is effort for oneself - for one's own job security, for better relationships at work and in society. Thus, mobility, while profitable to the employer by promoting the reorganisation of work, is also beneficial to the community at large.

([18]) Betheder, Marie-Claude. Ici, l'on apprend: Initiative-Emploi. *Le Monde*, Wednesday 13 September 1995.

([19]) Bué, Jean. Les différentes formes de flexibilité. *Travail et Emploi*, 1989, No 41.

([20]) Aquain, Valérie et al. Vingt ans d'évolution des conditions de travail. *Premières synthèses de la Dares*, mars 1994, n° 46.

([21]) Baudet, Marie-Béatrice. *Les nouveaux visages de la subordination*. Paris: Le Monde, 17 October 1995.

Even so, mobility has to be constructed and prepared; it cannot just be decreed. The vital instrument which is used to generate the competences and state of mind that make mobility possible is still the training of citizens and workers – not just during their initial period of training but throughout their lives.

Thus mobility is supported by recurrent training ([22]), a vital instrument of which is the certification of vocational knowledge.

3.3. Recurrent training – a factor of mobility

There is a direct relationship between level of qualification and mobility, both internal and external, both geographical and sectoral.

The concept of qualification is a complex one that has been forged throughout the 20th century; it was brought into focus by the organisation of labour that became common currency after the Second World War, reaching its peak in the mid-1970s.

The concept of qualification incorporates factors relating to:

(a) theoretical expertise or knowledge

(b) know-how and "know-what" or competences

(c) rights and duties, such as the statutory authorisation to engage in an occupation, one's place in the hierarchy, pay, benefits in kind, etc.

To the individual, skills form a complex object that is built up and maintained through initial and continuing training, by means of what Edgar Faure ([23]) called "permanent education".

How is a person's training organised over his or her life? We find it hard to disagree with the breakdown of life into three training periods: ([24]):

(a) Education and training in the school

(b) Period of entry into working life

(c) Adult education and training

The trend throughout Europe is to extend the duration of the first phase. This is partly justified by the need to prepare the working population for a world of growing complexity; but it is also closely linked with the current difficulties in finding employment.

([22]) As a rough approximation we shall assume here that the concepts of "recurrent training", "permanent education" and "lifelong learning" are very close, although not synonymous.

([23]) Faure, Edgar; et al. *Learning to be. The world of education today and tomorrow*. Paris: Unesco, 1972.

([24]) Trautmann, Jacques. Fin de l'idée d'éducation permanente?. In: *Actualité de la formation permanente*, No 159, p. 15-24. Paris: Centre INFFO, 1999.

The second phase, entry into the working world, has been growing in importance, especially with the introduction of measures designed to promote young people's transition to employment. This is a period of learning operating along the lines of alternating work and training.

The third phase, covering the greater part of an individual's life, is adult training, which has so far remained in the background. Very few countries in the European Union have, as in Denmark, made adult education a priority of their educational policies.

However, as we have already pointed out, mobility as a guarantee of social cohesion is closely correlated to the level of skills attained – especially as these skills must be constantly kept up. Work experience is an essential element of the qualification level, but theoretical knowledge is just as important. Furthermore, generic knowledge of both cognitive (ability to learn) and social kind (autonomy, ability to adapt and to co-operate) has become vital assets in the pattern of productive activity that is gradually becoming established at the end of this century.

A continuous period of work uninterrupted by a period of theoretical training is undoubtedly of benefit to professional experience and know-how but it entails wear and tear on qualifications as they age and as a person's theoretical and general knowledge become less relevant.

Too long a period out of work also adversely affects qualifications as knowledge and competences acquired in the past become obsolete. Such a period, however, may also be an opportunity to begin, or return to, theoretical training.

The lesson is that it pays for adult training to be recurrent. Work-linked training of a kind that maintains both aspects of skills – expertise and experience, knowledge and know-how – is one of the most suitable methods to achieve this. Alternating between training and work is just as effective in adult life as at the initial age of transition to the labour market.

The growing importance of generic, cognitive and social skills entails another major consequence: it narrows the all too prevalent divide between vocational training and general education, between the training of a worker and the training of a person. General and vocational training are two facets of the development of the human personality; one bolsters the other. A person's theoretical knowledge and generic skills provide a basis for the development of vocational training and competence. Conversely, vocational training and work experience may prove to be a good starting point for the broadening of general knowledge and a spur or stimulus for basic education and training; it is after all during the performance of a job that one often becomes aware of one's own shortcomings and consequent need for theoretical knowledge. As it becomes increasingly evident that training is a permanent process of education integrating various facets of knowledge the importance of validating learning – i.e. of recognising, evaluating and certifying knowledge, know-how and competences acquired in non-formal settings – becomes self-evident.

Recurrent training is in fact addressed to all; the range of fields and standards of knowledge, and of fields and standards of training, is infinite.

The validation of learning helps link educational and occupational pathways: the effort needed to attain a given training and/or mobility project can be assessed in the light of what has already been achieved. By limiting duplication and overlaps, this can save valuable training time and thus reduce training costs. It also provides an opportunity to review the standard of qualification among employees. This can be as useful to the employer - who is all too often unaware of his workforce's skills - as to the individual, employed or not, who may lack reference points e.g. after many years of working in the same enterprise or after too long a period of inactivity or unemployment.

Thus, the validation of learning is both a phase and an instrument of the educational process. It is vital that it should be rewarded by, or lead in the short term to, some form of recognition, certification, or diploma bestowing social acceptance and legitimacy. For this reason, we believe it is no longer desirable to create different titles and diplomas and certificates for the validation of work-based learning and for initial training. To use Jens Bjørnåvold's monetary metaphor in his article on methods and systems of evaluating informal learning ([25]) it is not desirable to create competing currencies, i.e. competing certification systems, for at least two reasons:

(a) Firstly because, according to Gresham's law, "bad money drives out good". When several types of certification co-exist, we will find that all the casualties of the system hold ad hoc certificates which in reality act as a stigma, preventing them from joining the main labour market, condemning them to the second tier and blocking their access to further quality training.

(b) Secondly, because one of the aims of validating learning is to provide a shared form for different individuals through education, training, access to qualification and the acquisition of skills. In short, the point is to add to social cohesion. What matters is the level of knowledge, experience and competence achieved – not which road one has taken to Rome, but whether one has arrived. Now it may be that all roads lead to Rome, but one has to make a start. The validation of knowledge is an excellent means of motivating individuals and spurring them on to embark on the educational process, to encourage them to design and implement their own personal and occupational plan. It represents recognition of an individual's status as a producer and his or her social role and therefore value. It is a way to boost self-esteem, combat feelings of inferiority and break the vicious circle of deskilling that shuts people off, blunts their appetite for knowledge and leads them to reject training (Agora IV).

Apart from this, the reskilling to which the validation of learning leads recognises individuals' right to access, through their work, a growing share of the gross national product, i.e. the added value produced by society. This allows people to hope for a better reward for efforts

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([25]) Bjørnåvold, Jens. A question of faith? Methods and systems of assessing non formal learning require a legitimate basis. *European Journal Vocational Training*, September-December 1997, No 12, p. 68-75. Available from Internet: http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/download/journal/bull-12/12-97-en.pdf [cited 30.5.2002]

expended in the production of goods and services. When one is aware of the threat that poor living conditions, instability and insecurity represent for society, such prospects, which constitute a major motivating factor, should not be overlooked.

3.4. Conclusion

The validation of learning has as its starting point a generous idea: that "there is no such thing as a man without qualities". It is a generous idea because it is based on the recognition of the Other as partner and fellow citizen, regardless of his or her starting level of qualification. It reflects the resolve to recognise the effort made by every individual in his social and working life to acquire knowledge and skills of use to society, and admits that there is no one training path. Thus, the validation of learning is part of a generous move towards greater acceptance; it is an moral choice to evaluate effort fairly and to capitalise on knowledge and skills. It subscribes to the idea that nobody should be excluded a priori either from the right of access to a reasonable share of social wealth or from the duty to contribute to its production. This also implies that there is no reason to accept the law of the market, and the flexibility it imposes, as inevitable, or to believe that our societies can only stay wealthy at the price of excluding and impoverishing certain categories of worker.

To counteract the principle of flexibility we need to apply the principle of voluntary, value-enhancing mobility. To achieve this the general population will need to reach a minimum standard of qualification. This in turn will require a process of recurrent training (permanent education, as Edgar Faure would call it, or lifelong learning, as the White Paper says) in which the recognition and validation of non formal learning is an essential tool.

Generosity and fairness are also prerequisites for restoring social cohesion. Permanent education worthy of the name, combining initial and continuing, general and vocational, training is truly a prerequisite for mobility and for the development of the labour force's adaptability.

Nevertheless, it cannot stand alone. It is not enough for the active population to be able to adapt to the changes and needs of the production system; the system itself must be able to integrate this qualified personnel. This, however, is another issue – not a problem of educational science, but a macroeconomic and political problem of how to share jobs and incomes and how social partners should co-operate.

As stated by Jean Paul Fitoussi, Director of the Observatoire Français de Conjoncture Économique, "The solution to the gravest problem faced by a democracy in peacetime, i.e. mass unemployment, [cannot] be found if we resign ourselves to an overwhelming rise in inequalities and to the dismantling [of the] social welfare system. On the contrary, the solution lies in greater cohesion - not just for reasons of morality, but also of effectiveness [...]. Equity

[must] not be a secondary concern, a dressing for the wounds created by circumstances; [it is] the very prerequisite of effectiveness". ([26])

([26]) Fitoussi, Jean-Paul. *Compétitivité et cohésion sociale*. Lettre de l'OFCE n°°133. Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po, 1994

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4. Social partners round table – Is there any consensus on the validation of non-formal learning and if so, what?

Eugenio Rosa ([27]), *Mike Coles* ([28]), *Donald Kerr* ([29])

4.1. Eugenio Rosa

Do we agree about what the validation of learning means? Is there any consensus on this question and if so, to what extent?

I should first of all like to thank Cedefop for this kind invitation to discuss an issue of extreme importance to us in Portugal. It is important because about 70% of the people working in enterprises in Portugal have at most the basic school-leaving certificate, and their skills have been acquired through experience rather than academic channels. This is therefore a crucial issue in Portugal. We in the trade unions are giving very great attention to the matter, to the extent that we have developed a pilot experiment, which I shall describe to you here.

As early as 1985, the CGTP provided vocational training throughout the country, in vocational colleges and schools run by both the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education, which were then to be found in eight regions in the country, with about eight hundred students. Very recently, we signed an agreement with the Ministry of Labour, and together with that Ministry we have set up centres to train workers throughout the country. In 1998, as part of a community programme, we also set up a distance learning centre for workers in SME, and we are already offering distance learning courses.

On the basis of this varied long-standing experience, we set out in 1996 to introduce an internal certificate for the training which we provide. Why?

In 1991, a vocational training agreement had already been signed between the Government and the social partners, including the CGTP. Under this agreement, a standing tripartite certification committee was established from that date. In 1994, tripartite technical

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([27]) Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses – Intersindical Nacional (CGTP-IN) – Portugal. Available on the Internet: http://www.cgtp.pt/index2.htm [cited 18. 2.2002]

([28]) The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) – United Kingdom. Available on the Internet: http://www.qca.org.uk [cited 18.2.2002]

([29]) Foras Áiseanna Saothair – Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) – Ireland. Available on the Internet: http://www.fas.ie [cited 18.2.2002]

certification committees were in place for most occupations. At a practical level, however, the work done so far by these committees has been very limited. This huge administrative machine has succeeded in doing only two things to date: validating training for trainers and, in 1999, providing certification and validation for the occupation of taxi-driving.

There is also certification for some occupations with little impact on the economy, such as cable-laying, etc. There is thus no certification for the vast majority of training in Portugal, even though tripartite certification committees have already been at work for quite a number of years.

That is why, in view of this situation, we were obliged to introduce what we call internal certification for our own training courses. There are two types of evaluation for the training which we provide:

(a) evaluation of knowledge carried out by trainers throughout the course;

(b) at the end of each training course, we have introduced a scheme or system of internal evaluation distinct from that used by the trainers.

This 'pilot' system of internal certification (it is an experimental system), which we have been operating since 1996, has already been implemented in about 200 courses, involving some 3000 trainees.

At first, we had based the aims of the system on those of systems aiming to certificate exactly the operations needed to carry out the tasks of a given occupation.

However, this certification is broad-based. It is intended not only to validate the knowledge acquired by trainees in the training courses which they have completed, but also the skills which they may have acquired in previous training, and the skills which they will have learnt from work experience. This final evaluation is independent of the system of evaluating knowledge applied by teachers during training courses. It is based directly on the various occupations. As a result, we have started to prepare a manual for 21 occupations in which we provide vocational training, in order to define the essential core of each job, and to determine what we regard as the key skills and knowledge for the job in question. This forms part of a manual that we have devised in our training centre.

In order to put this system in train, we enter into a contract at the end of each training course with a professional in the occupation concerned, selected on the basis of experience and knowledge. For example, when we finish a book-keeping course, we enter into a contract with a book-keeping professional who is not a teacher (and has preferably never been one) in order to carry out the internal certification. On the basis of the standards, key knowledge and skills in the manual, this professional then creates instruments which may be used as simulations of real situations, as classroom exercises.

At the end of a course, trainees are evaluated on the basis of a relatively neutral instrument as to the key skills which we regard as essential to carry out that particular occupation. It is the

results of this test that are included in the evaluation certificate, which is different from the other knowledge evaluation certificate drawn up by the trainers throughout the training course.

Since 1996, there being no system akin to certification of occupational skills in Portugal, we ensure that each trainee has at the end of the course a certificate of knowledge acquired that is linked to the training course or training programme, and has in addition a certificate of occupation-specific skills in which he or she has been tested.

This system, which we have set up in our training courses, is having beneficial effects, both because it permits evaluation of the training system itself and because it allows a training system to evolve in as much as from the start of the course every trainer and every trainee prepares in accordance with those characteristics.

On the basis of this actual experience over three years involving more than 3000 trainees, a number of conclusions can be drawn, which I shall put to you now.

A credible skills certification system is essential because of the information which it can provide both to the trainees on the course and to employers. It also supplies training bodies with information about the quality of the training which they carry out.

In the absence of a suitable certification system, a country may have a large number of training courses of inadequate quality. Moreover, a certification system means that training courses will meet the needs of employers.

For workers it is also essential in that it gives them a document which recognises their skills, not only their formal skills but also their experience.

The employers' organisations have strong reservations about the tripartite committees which I mentioned just now, even to the point where some committees are completely paralysed (financial services and banking). This is despite the fact that at the individual company level, certification would provide a guarantee that potential employees had the skills that the company was looking for.

Another major finding from the Portuguese experience is that it is in fact very difficult to acquire all the skills required to do a job at one go, and from our experience I believe that we should move towards step-by-step validation and certification of skills.

Furthermore, the boundaries of occupations are in flux, new skills constantly being incorporated and others becoming obsolete. In my view, certification should not go further than what each worker needs for his or her activities.

On the other hand, while accepting that formal qualifications are important – whether awarded by universities or training centres – and in the knowledge that the principle of certification cannot be called into question as such, I believe that certification should essentially be based on tests taken in the real or simulated working context rather than on a simple examination. Workers should also not be obliged to have all the key skills in a given occupation validated,

but only those which are relevant to them and for which they feel prepared. They should be asked to undergo further tests at later dates in order to obtain certification of the additional skills used in carrying out the job, which they will acquire through work experience.

These skills and certificates should not be obtained through any form of training course, but through experience.

The key skills of which I am speaking, both theoretical and practical knowledge, will form part of a list of skills drawn up by the tripartite technical certification committees. For the system to function, however, it is not entirely necessary that this list should cover all occupations and all key skills. It would be enough for certain key skills to be identified for the most significant occupations, the list then being updated regularly, in terms of both occupations and key skills.

The development of certification instruments and the refining of tests would then be entrusted to one of the tripartite technical certification committees. But experience has shown that although the technical aspect is crucial, attention must also be given to the quality of work.

If a system of certification is actually to be applied, it might be decided that it should operate initially in those occupations where certification of skills is feasible, and that it should be expanded gradually to include a larger number of occupations and key skills as new skills are identified.

The skills of each worker thus certified would be entered in the worker's record card (*carnet*) of final skills, part of the cost being borne by employers and part by the State.

4.2. Mike Coles

Do you agree with the reasons given by Eugenio Rosa for the importance of the certification of informal skills?

I must apologise for using the term 'informal skills'. I have no problem with the clarification of this term put forward by Jens Bjørnåvold, and 'non-formal skills' is fine with me. It is simply because of my English that I did not adjust correctly earlier.

Éric Fries Guggenheim asked me to give a government view, but the QCA is merely a government agency. There is a gap between this organisation and the Government of the United Kingdom. That said, we do implement government policy, and that qualifies me to some extent to speak as a 'policy-maker'.

From an administrative point of view, I have four conclusions to draw about non-formal learning.

But first, I must point out a certain number of features peculiar to England, and the United Kingdom more generally, in respect of non-formal learning, because things are changing very rapidly in this field.

The first point is that, as in many other European countries, we are pursuing a general policy of trying to overcome the barriers and obstacles which hold back participation in training.

In the United Kingdom, this is called the 'New Deal'. It is a very broad programme, which cuts across many government departments, and training and employment are of course among its chief concerns. One of the major aspects of the New Deal in relation to non-formal learning is that people who are excluded and educationally or economically inactive are obliged to take part in a face-to-face interview to answer questions about their previous training and educational and work experience, and about their future. To some extent, this necessarily leads to recognition of the value of their informal learning, as well as of their formal education.

A second very important development in the United Kingdom, of direct relevance to informal learning, is the Government proposal to create something called the University for Industry([30]). The term 'University for Industry' is problematic in itself since the word 'university' suggests 'universality', while 'industry' indicates 'work', work only ever being one particular facet of human activity.

It is the Government's intention to get 600 000 new learners back into active life each year, either into jobs or into formal or informal learning. As regards non-formal learning, extensive research has been carried out in the United Kingdom, revealing that around a third of the 600 000 people targeted, i.e. 200 000 individuals, are engaged in informal training which they

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([30]) Available on the Internet: http://www.ufiltd.co.uk [cited 18.2.2002]

The University for Industry (UFI) is a new initiative launched by the Government to:

(a) stimulate demand for lifelong learning amongst businesses and individuals;

(b) promote the availability of, and improve access to, relevant, high quality and innovative learning, in particular through the use of information and communications technologies.

The UFI will act as a broker helping people and businesses to identify their learning needs and to access this learning in the right form. It aims to break down barriers to learning by making provision more flexible and accessible. It will promote learning ranging from the basic skills of literacy and numeracy to specialised technological skills and business management. The organisation will carry out six key activities:

(i) analyse the needs of the market and potential customers;

(ii) drive the demand for learning through mass marketing and promotion;

(iii) provide people with information, advice and guidance;

(iv) ensure the availability of, and connect customers to, high quality learning programmes that match their needs;

(v) commission new content where there are gaps in existing supply and demand which cannot otherwise be met;

(vi) ensure the quality of products and services which the UFI brokers or commissions (DfEE 1998).

Cf. http://www.coleg-powys.ac.uk/aded/ufi.htm
http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/greenpaper/ch1003.htm
http://www.ufiltd.co.uk

would like to see accredited or validated in one way or another. This figure corresponds to about 1% of the total population, or 2 to 3% of the active population.

The new initiative, the University for Industry, which will be launched in 2000, currently involves publishers, producers of radio programmes, training bodies and employers, and creates transversal links between a number of agencies which either provide training or are responsible for accrediting formal and/or informal learning.

All this should lead to a formal approach to the recognition of non-formal learning: a sort of APL system([31]). A large number of people engaged in informal learning would like to see their personal level of knowledge and skills recognised in one way or another. The system should achieve this result, under the banner of the University for Industry. The aim is to provide a bridge between these people and formal learning, to which they may have access at a later stage, and this is one of the major purposes of the scheme.

Another field in which the University for Industry might promote recognition of informal learning is the establishment of standards. After all, somebody has to establish standards somewhere. The University for Industry should make it possible to devise a system of standards, avoiding an excessive growth in bureaucracy, but maintaining the responsibility of the State for the formal qualifications to which APL relates.

The third point I should like to mention before coming to my conclusions is the development of the NVQ system([32]), which was already alluded to this morning.

Widespread consultation is under way in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on the form of the NVQ system. Many people argue in fact that the system is not flexible enough. People who are engaged in tasks, odd bits of work and odd bits of training, do not obtain recognition of their work because a NVQ is a global qualification and contains a whole series of units of

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([31]) Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)

- means that you have studied a course in an approved programme in some other or this institution before and passed the assessment at an acceptable level;
- you will need to provide details of the syllabus of the equivalent course;
- you will need to provide details of the assessment and your grades, including an official copy of the certificate and a transcript of marks.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)

- means you have acquired the necessary learning outcomes for the course for which you are applying for exemption/credit transfer by virtue of your professional experience in the recent past;
- you need to provide details of your RELEVANT experience;
- you also need to get a signed affidavit from your manager to testify that you have done these tasks at a professional and acceptable quality. If you were working on a project as part of a team – this affidavit and you application making a case for exemption must show what role you played and what your contribution was.

Cf. http://cms1.gre.ac.uk/APEL/
http://cms1.gre.ac.uk/APEL/what_is_APL.html
http://www.d fee.gov.uk/heqe/let_final.htm

([32]) NVQ – National Vocational Qualification. Available on the Internet: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/nvq/ [cited on 18.2.2002]

differing sizes and different levels. In this consultation, people in the United Kingdom, all partners in the United Kingdom, are being asked whether candidates should be permitted to obtain unit credits for individual units. They are being asked, among other things, what size these units should be, and particularly whether there should be a common size for all units, as is the case at other points in the United Kingdom education system, where some of the initial education system is standardised and all units are of the same size. They are also being asked whether there should be levels, each unit giving an indication of the level of learning achieved. This all leads to the question whether the NVQ system should be integrated into a more general system based on credit units, in which individuals in different levels of training, and different sectors of employment, would be able to acquire credits for the parts that apply to them. And that would have consequences for informal learning because, if the NVQ system were less inflexible, it would encourage people to seek accreditation of their informal learning by means of NVQs.

So far, the opinions gathered through this consultation process are very divided. Some people take the view that NVQs are by nature specific to particular areas of employment, and that this is one of their key merits, which should not be called into question by having a whole range of units allowing credits to be gained separately. Others see the possibility of giving people units that are valid in their own right within a national system of qualifications as adding value.

A fourth aspect of the situation in the United Kingdom that I must mention concerns the attitudes of certain employers. Obviously, some of our major employers are looking for independent ways of testing skills. This is not yet a widespread phenomenon, but it is revealing and may be of concern to researchers because we have found that some of our largest employers, in both the public and the private sector, are looking for independent yardsticks to measure competence in terms of key skills, especially after initial training (which brings us back to the Portuguese experience). They are attempting to create their own scenarios enabling them to recruit young applicants for particular jobs by measuring their results in terms of key skills rather than in academic terms. This is one of the developments that are taking place.

The final point I wish to make is this: in the United Kingdom, and especially in England and Wales, we are starting from a particularly low level of participation in full-time training among young people aged 16 plus. Over the last ten years we have seen an increase in participation in the United Kingdom, but this trend has now ceased and the situation has more or less definitely levelled off. We are still very low down in the European tables. Our researchers maintain that present-day young people pay far more attention than in the past to economic possibilities, and some are even in a position to say: 'I don't need such and such a course now, I shall have the chance to take it later. I don't need to take a full-time training course at this precise moment; I can do other things in my life'. The rhetoric of lifelong learning in which we are currently immersed is likely to encourage people to postpone their training and their commitment to compulsory education until somewhat later, well after the age of 16. This is a trend that needs to be looked at closely in the United Kingdom.

Bearing all these factors in mind, I should now like to raise four issues relating to the recognition of non-formal learning, starting with a few observations from the standpoint of a body such as the QCA, which regulates qualifications and is responsible for promoting lifelong learning in the United Kingdom.

First of all, encouraging people to learn is our key objective. Whatever form learning may take, there are cogent reasons to think that recognition of informal – non-formal – learning provides a powerful incentive to learn. We can therefore say that systems of recognition and validation are high on our list of priorities because they can enable us to achieve one of our main objectives.

We also know from our research that formal education has not managed to satisfy the needs of a certain number of individuals, and we have to do something for them. I shall give a few examples of steps that we can take.

My first conclusion is therefore that we should like to see greater efforts to set up a system of accreditation of prior learning and recognition of non-formal learning because that would encourage people to learn.

The second point, in our capacity as QCA, is that we should like to see a coherent system established.

It is very important, whatever the system established, that people should, whatever their point of view, see credit-bearing courses and qualifications linked together coherently and transparently. I believe that far from wanting to create more bureaucracy, our aim is to see a system set up which will provide a whole set of links between qualifications and credit-bearing courses, rather than a rigid system of national qualifications.

My third point is that we are responsible for regulating qualifications, wherever awarded and however funded, whether they are awarded within the academic system or outside that system, whether they are funded by the State or not. Hence, it is in our interest to establish links between the different types of non-formal learning and formal qualifications. As I said earlier, this is one of the major challenges facing the University for Industry.

We should like to be able to ensure that every learner, every person, can progress from where he or she is towards the next stage (training, employment or whatever else this may be). And we are also very concerned to see it remain a responsibility of the public sector to lay down certain standards in England and Wales. This means that we should like, at the QCA, to see links created between formal and non-formal training.

My fourth and last conclusion is straightforward, but important. We are finding out a lot about the reasons why the formal system is inappropriate, by observing the places where people go to learn informally. And if we try to recognise informal learning a little more systematically,

we may be able to see where our national system of formal qualifications is deficient, and we may then be able to improve that system of qualifications so that we meet the needs.

4.3. Donald Kerr (FÁS – IRL)

I must say to start with that all this really is like an Agora, in the sense that I have been plucked from the obscurity of the hall and thrust into the limelight to talk to people because, you see, my name is not even on the agenda. I was indeed merely a guest and when I arrived this morning, I was asked if I would like to take part in a round table. As a result I have no formal presentation for you. I shall nonetheless put a few points to you, and maybe even a few pointers for discussion.

The first point is to build a bridge between trainers, certificators, political decision-makers and, indeed, all workers.

To what extent do employers and trade unions recognise certification and, in the case of employers, to what extent do they remunerate it?

Because if they don't, a large part of the effort going into it may lead to nothing. And to come back to what Riel Miller said earlier about the domination of training by the supply side, even the evaluation of prior learning is currently dominated by the supply side.

I therefore believe that we need to think about this domination by the 'supply' side and that we must restore the 'demand' side. I believe that this is indeed one of the objectives of today's Agora; what has to be done is in fact to build bridges between political decision-makers, educators and the world of work.

Given that this is the case, I should just like to raise a small number of points in relation to APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning).

Our approach to APL has been dominated by the idea of access to certification: it is part of our policy of access to certification. However, even in a very recent Government Bill, published by our Minister of Education ten days ago, which speaks of access, this still means access to education. I believe that a great distinction has to be drawn between access to education and access to certification.

There is another point that I should like to raise in relation to certification. Do we place the bar at a certain height (the candidate either receiving a certificate or not), or do we recognise achievements in the form of a credit system?

In Ireland, we tend currently to recognise results achieved rather than to give full recognition to skills in relation to a given activity. To that extent, I think that it will be easier to accommodate APL in the vocational training sector than in education.

And I say that because what matters in our approach is the focus on skills. If skills are certificated, then courses are not certificated. That is the essential point, and it emerges clearly in the NVQ system, which speaks of outcomes. Wherever the term 'outcomes' is used, I talk simply of 'skills'. What is certificated is skills, not training courses.

That being so, each of us, wherever we were trained, be it college or university, had our courses certificated, I'm willing to bet. We were given a course, then we were asked questions about the course, and then, if we answered enough questions about the course, we were 'declared' qualified.

I should like to ask how many people there are in the hall who are still working today in the field in which they were trained. Very few? Anyone? And, at the same time, very few of us have received certification of our current skills, needless to say. However, in our type of work, this may be accepted far more readily than in workshops or industries, where people have in some way to demonstrate and provide evidence of their skills so that these are recognised.

This is much easier in the field of training, where there are set standards. For example, you may have to do something such as reduce the thickness of a piece by 3 mm.

All manner of standards can be established in relation to the recognition of prior learning.

If something is studied in the school system, such as history, the question that we ask ourselves is: what skill is being certificated? Are we certificating people's ability to tell stories, or is it a matter of judgment, analysis, prioritisation or anything else that may be undertaken in history?

As for our approach, we are a vocational training agency, and we have never tried to develop theory any further. Our point of view is that, where we use the material that already exists in the literature, our job is to transform it into a model, or scheme of work, which will work for people in the real world. We have done this for several different occupations.

We have used the 'portfolio' approach. We have also used computer-based expert systems. And we have set examinations each time.

The simplest and cheapest way of proceeding is as follows: we subject people in the world of work to the same type of test which people would take if they followed a course.

Another important point in relation to that – which brings us back to the starting point of Mike Coles, who wants to establish links between non-formal learning, formal qualifications and common standards – is that if a certificate is awarded to people regardless of whether they have followed a course or not, there should be no distinction between the certificates issued. If we are certificating skills, we must give exactly the same certificates. And it is our policy not to write on the certificate that the certification was achieved through APL. We give a certificate to candidates if they can show that they have attained the standard required for that certificate.

Another difference between education and vocational training is that education often stresses exemptions, the number of modules from which one is exempted. If someone wants to follow a course, then APL is regarded rather as a way of handling exemptions. People may in fact find themselves exempted from certain modules of a course, but be obliged to take a certain number of others. In our approach to APL, we have opted for accreditation to certificate the skills acquired in the non-formal sector.

For example, in our National Council of Education, with its policy of awards for APL, actually APEL, it is not possible to obtain credits for more than half of the courses that one intends to take. One has to attend courses for at least one semester and to sit examinations after following courses given by teachers using traditional methods, which means that they still have jobs. You cannot obtain a qualification solely through APL.

Another word about trade unions and employers' organisations. Any procedure for the validation of learning is in effect related to the issue of evaluation at the workplace. We have to be able to devise models for the evaluation of skills at the workplace. Our models need be easier to apply in employers' premises and at the workplace.

I should also like to highlight just one other point: that of salaries. I mentioned that the outside world, employers and unions, for example, need to recognise these certificates. There can in fact be no progress unless there is some recognition. And to come back to what Mike Coles said about 'encouraging learning', I believe that some employers are willing to work with the unions and to create the conditions to encourage this formal learning, and that this must be linked to the way in which skills are recognised, notably in terms of salary. The issue of salaries must therefore be faced at one time or another in this field, so as to encourage people to engage in lifelong learning, and to draw a line below which people are. As for employers, it is important for them to know what kind of employees they have. The accreditation of vocational learning at the workplace is making this possible.

One of the projects we have undertaken was in South Africa for the Building and Training Board. We gave a presentation of APL for people living in the townships. We worked with the Ministry of Labour, and Marian Nieskens, who is present here, worked for the Ministry of Education. Under apartheid, Blacks received no training. But there were many people living in the townships who worked on building sites. As a result, they had acquired a large number of skills, but had never obtained any recognition for those skills. In democratic South Africa, one of the goals was to give people recognition for the skills that they had acquired. Our mission was thus to give individuals a certificate or written recognition, or at least to draw a line indicating where their skills were located.

The actual exercise, consisting of arranging for the recognition of individuals' prior learning, was also of great benefit to the State, in that it identified training needs. Because it identified what people could do and to what extent they needed training, it was possible to send them on courses in the fields where they were not competent. Attention focused in fact on two aspects:

(a) identification of training needs at the national level in the construction industry;

(b) a basis by which people could be certificated.

By way of concluding these few observations, I should also like to speak about two ongoing Leonardo APL projects in which we are involved, one of which is managed by the Dutch – Marian Nieskens could tell you a bit more about it – and the other of which is managed by the European Vocational Training Association. The European Vocational Training Association brings together all the major training agencies in Europe: besides FÁS, there are AFPA, INEM, AIVP, OAED in Greece, AEB in Germany, KOLO in the Netherlands, VDAP and FOREM in Belgium and we have, in fact, submitted a joint project on accreditation of prior learning. What we would like to achieve is to construct a common model applicable to this whole range of countries; we should like to find out whether this is feasible. Certificates will in fact be national certificates because the whole question of mutual recognition of standards is a different issue, and we did not want to complicate this project by introducing that dimension as well. This project has in fact been undertaken in order to show that the same model could work in all Member States. And as I said, the Dutch College in the Netherlands is running a somewhat similar project, and Marian Nieskens will be able to speak a bit more about it in a few minutes.

Moreover, to come back briefly to the remarks about the role of supply with particular reference to the education sector, it must be admitted that APL does present problems to people working in the education sector because it reduces the power of teachers. We are back with the issue of supply and demand, and I shall end where I began. Because teachers can no longer control 'inputs', and because certificates are certificates based on skills, power is shifting away from teachers. To the extent that the outcomes of learning are specified by someone other than themselves, they lose control of training courses. That is, for me, the most important aspect of APL that should be mentioned.

In conclusion, I should just like to recall that the Commission held its first meeting on European policy in this field of recognition of learning at the start of 1995. The accreditation of prior learning (APL) was in its infancy. Jens Bjørnåvold pointed this out: the French initiative dates from 1992, then work was begun on NVQs in the United Kingdom, and so on. The beginnings in Europe thus date from the early 1990s. I suggested at that time that the Commission should launch an initiative, so that we might all develop similar systems. The reply I received was of course that this was not possible because of the subsidiarity rule contained in the Maastricht Treaty. Nonetheless, we are now attempting to learn from one another and to harmonise with each other.

5. Work related projects on new methods of skill definition and accreditation: moves towards a personal skills medium in the USA and in Europe

Barbara Jones and Kari Hadjivassiliou

Accelerating rates of technological and social change have increasingly complex effects on demand for skill in labour markets. Skills evolve, converge or diverge and become obsolete, and new skills emerge from the development of new technologies and new working methods. New technologies simultaneously lead to new pedagogic methods and new procedures for the accreditation of skills. In order to maintain social cohesion and equity it is necessary to activate the prior learning and peripheral skills of the population at large for direct application and to provide a basis for adaptation to new skills requirements. All industrialised nations face similar problems but in addition the USA and the member states of the EU are simultaneously trying to come to terms with the consequences of their historically fragmented systems of skills training and accreditation. The USA has had to seek solutions to the same kinds of problems concerning individual labour mobility and trans-border enterprise as now face the member states of the European Union. This paper briefly describes some aspects of a preliminary study (Cullen & Jones 1997) made of skills standards and accreditation trends in the USA and gives an overview of a newly funded EU research project, Competence Evaluation and Training for Europe (COMPETE) which investigates the possibility of using new methods of skill accreditation and skill definition.

5.1. American Perspectives

The preliminary study of state of the art accreditation of competencies carried out for DGXII was intended to gather information to prepare the ground for preparatory actions associated with the implementation of Objective 1 of the 1995 White Paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*. As part of Objective 1 the EU is currently considering ways of developing an initiative aimed at building a European Skills Accreditation System. The major aim of this would be permanent and accessible skill accreditation mechanisms that will allow individuals to validate their knowledge, however it has been acquired. Central to this requirement would be the exploitation of new technologies via portable skills media, such as personal smart cards, that would allow citizens to record their training and experience on portable, computer-readable media.

The preliminary study considered the structure and practice of vocational training, skills profiling and occupational classification, accreditation and technology applications for

competence definition and accreditation. A set of case studies were carried out involving recent innovations in the US in competence definition and accreditation. From the results of the appraisal and the detailed case studies, a set of major themes of interest to the European Skills Accreditation System was selected and explored, leading to the identification of key challenges and obstacles, and finally elaboration of conclusions and recommendations. Some of these conclusions form the basis of research questions raised within the COMPETE project. What follows is a selective look at some of those findings.

The US system of VET superficially displays many of the characteristics likely to be realised in the vision of a European Accreditation System. It has a decentralised structure, with little federalised top-down control. It has largely been shaped by the needs and agendas of business and the market, and it addresses localised as well as national labour demands. It is primarily market-driven and locally determined, reflecting consumer and employer demand. In this context, federal control is reactive, rather than pro-active, and largely consists of the influence of national and state incentives on local actions.

Current reform is concerned with changing the historically decentralised character of skill training. This reform can be placed within the context of a decade or more of rising concern that American workers (at all levels) - current and future - lack the workplace skills necessary to meet the challenges of technological advance, organisational restructuring and global economic competition. New jobs, it is widely perceived, require individuals coming from high schools and post-secondary institutions to possess certain generic employability skills that include problem solving, communications and personal skills. The keystone *Commission on the Skills of the American Work Force* (1990) concluded that an improved system of skills standards and transparent certification is essential for improving the 'fit' between what is learned in school and what is needed on-the-job, facilitating the movement from school to work, from occupation to occupation, from state to state, from locality to locality and ultimately strengthening the capacity of the US economy to compete.

The 'skills standards movement' which has emerged as an important tool in engineering major reform of the US system of skill certification, is both a response to definitional changes in skill engendered by the changing nature of work in an internationally integrated competitive economy and part of the convergence process which is a necessary concomitant of that definitional change.

The skills standard movement forms the background to recent innovations in competence definition and accreditation within the US. These innovations have been orchestrated through a strategic and systematic package of measures, precipitated by the 1994 legislation on higher education and national opportunities - the National Skills Standards Board, Goals 2000, School-to-Work Programme - which all act to catalyse the formation of voluntary partnerships to develop skills standards.

School to Work is an attempt to bridge the gap between school and work by developing portable skills certificates that can transfer across the State line. The biggest barrier to the development of such certificates is the absence of a common lexicon and nomenclature for

skills - so the first step in the Programme has been to encourage partnerships to buy into a common skills language.

The enactment of *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (1994), established the National Skills Standard Board (NSSB). This business-led Board has the specific remit of 'stimulating' the development and adoption of a voluntary national system of skill standards across broad economic sectors, which would be 'guidelines' used by the voluntary partnerships The 1994 Act requires that the voluntary partnerships include an employer, union, worker, community and education and training representatives. In tandem with the Board's creation the US Departments of Labour and Education awarded $1.8m funding to industry and research groups to conduct pilot study research in:

(a) testing concepts for implementation of standards in different types of workplaces

(b) examining methods of assessing and certifying skills levels

(c) informing the development of curriculum and guidelines for teaching work-force skills

(d) exploring ways to build strategic partnerships among constituencies

(e) sharing information about related initiatives underway by businesses, states and localities

(f) studying issues involved in encouraging more business to become quality-driven work organisations

The 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act complemented the intention of Goals 2000 by calling for educational programmes that lead to 'nationally recognised' skills certificates. The Act focused on three structural components: work-based learning, school-based learning and connecting activities, such as career guidance. Notwithstanding that there is opposition to 'top-down' reforms from a central government, it was clear that the business community is generally offering strong support for national skills standards as part of a framework for business and educational partnerships at national, state, and local levels. It is the putative transparency that such a system promises that appeals to a wide range of US stakeholders. Such a system would enable clearer identification of qualified workers, save money on applicant screening, aid in recruiting and improve public perception of firms. For students the system would indicate what they must learn, which particular skills they will use in the workplace, and how they can become accredited. Students, including graduates, would also have better access to a national labour market if certification is recognised nationally, promoting geographical and occupational mobility

5.2. O*NET

Underpinning the reforms and made possible by advances in information and communication technologies is the US Occupational Information Network - O*NET.

O*Net is a partnership network between government (federal, state and local), industry and training providers that will allow data collection to develop skills profiles to further facilitate

the assessment and validation of competencies. The network is designed to feed data into a relational database that will capture the evolving changes in the US economy, promote more efficient classification of these changes in terms of job profiles and associated competencies, and enable specific tasks to be carried out using the database. O*NET therefore has the potential to:

(a) facilitate occupational classification standardisation by providing cross-walks between different classification systems (for example the US Department of Labour classification; the US Army system; different state classification systems)

(b) enable particular sets of skills to be matched to employment (for example in identifying employment generation strategies in depressed areas)

(c) identify skills deficits in particular labour forces

(d) enable reviews of labour market trends to be undertaken

(e) forecast human resource requirements facilitate performance appraisals and skills evaluation

(f) provide benchmarks to develop relevant and transparent credentials

O*NET is based on a content model which classifies data into six domains, designed to integrate a number of key dimensions considered to structure work as a human activity. Thus, it interconnects worker requirements or attributes of a job with worker characteristics, experience and qualifications, the organisational context of a job and the occupation specific skills that are associated with it. Further O*NET is intended to be integrated with the generic curriculum structure of the US secondary education system. Currently, in New York, work is going on to test a number of front-end interfaces to O*NET to enable the system to integrate skills standards more fully with the school environment. These include the Interest Profiler and Work Importance Locator, self-assessment tools designed to help school students identify the attributes and expectations they hold about possible careers.

The content model is designed to be continually updated through the use of on-line questionnaires completed by participating employers. In return, the O*NET database is intended to act as the hub of a network of collaborative organisations which will receive information resources, counselling tools , performance appraisals and skills evaluation in return for provision of occupational data.

O*NET is currently being tested in five states: in California (multimedia and entertainment industries; in Minnesota (integration with state labour market information system); in New York (career counselling for School-to-Work initiative); in South Carolina (job-matching); and Texas (work programmes for dislocated workers).

The intention of current US education and labour legislation is to create a voluntary framework of national skills standards. The US however has little experience of large-scale systems for certifying the skills of new or experienced workers (Berryman & Rosenbaum 1992). It is clear that European and Japanese experience in this area has informed much of the

current US debate, and indeed informs the goals of the 1994 acts. In the most general terms it is felt that European skills standards systems offer more advanced support for education and/or work based skills development. This advantage is further strengthened by the existence of independently developed and administered exit examinations given after compulsory education which are supported by the central or territorial governments. The long histories of central government supporting and promoting third party certification of skills and knowledge gained through vocational preparation programmes are perceived as huge advantages.

Both in Europe and in the US there is a need to improve the flow of information between, schools, students, work seekers and employers. Employers need to know more about what job applicants can do and to inform students and job seekers what types of skills/experience they need to acquire to be eligible for particular jobs or occupations. A dedicated on-line electronic system matching occupations, job vacancies, jobseekers' qualifications and experience is seen as clearly advantageous.

The skills standards reform aims also to provide a forum and framework for employers to articulate their needs in ways that can be understood by schools, students and workers. Major obstacles are apparent both in the US and within the European context, predominantly because of the changing nature of non-professionalised and non-managerial occupations. Portable skills media (PSM), like skills smartcards and even genericised skill standards, are irrelevant unless contextualised in a way that links the needs of workers to the needs of employers and other stakeholders. This contextualisation requires that skills taxonomies and the certification structures for those skills is generally and widely accepted. Such a framework depends, to be effective and relevant, on the development and operationalisation of a comprehensive taxonomy of skills-based occupational clusters able to adapt to changing work patterns and an accompanying skill validations infrastructure.

5.3. Content models and skills taxonomies

The ongoing initiatives in the US to develop comprehensive taxonomies of occupational clusters include O*Net, the electronic adaptation of the new Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) and SCANS. Other initiatives function as inter-related projects (as with O*Net) under the general direction of America's Labour Market Information System (ALMIS) and USDOL.

The DOT adaptation project (1993) is rooted in a content model that describes skills across a broad continuum, from very general aptitudes, abilities and basic skills to occupation specific and technical skills and knowledge. This new content model is intended to capture data on the increasingly cognitive demands of jobs and the new ways of thinking, managing and organising that focus on quality, variety, speed and customer services. The DOT database represents part of the convergence process aiming at connection between occupations, emphasising skills transferability and links with related databases of education and labour market information.

The content models of DOT and O*Net reflect current thinking in the US that the skill profile needs of high-performance work organisation can no longer be served by skill needs derived from traditional conceptions of work. These new types of skills are referred to as advanced generic skills or SCANS skills (named after the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills -USDOL 1991). Both Content Models of O*Net and DOT are based on SCANS typology.

This typology is located in the recognition that a break from the old skills/task orientated components model is necessary. SCANS began by analysing the skill requirements of emerging technology and innovative work organisation. Five competencies and three foundation skills were identified as essential to either work preparation or further education. The following were identified as basic/foundation skill components:

(a) Basic Skills - reading, writing, mathematics, speaking and listening

(b) Thinking Skills - thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, knowing how to learn and reasoning

(c) Personal Qualities - individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management & integrity

SCANs broadens the conception of occupational skills by denoting the need for generic workplace competencies which they identified as:

(a) ability to allocate resources

(b) interpersonal skills

(c) acquiring, evaluating and managing information

(d) understanding systems

(e) using, selecting and troubleshooting technology

The SCANS approach broadens the base of skills categorisations by adding a new more professionalised and autonomous dimension to worker's roles, and thus contains implications for curriculum and training changes. The SCANS approach was generally reflected in many of the content models examined by the preliminary study and confirmed the tendency towards national convergence via voluntary agreements with education, industry and government for nationally recognised generic skill standards.

5.4. Accreditation

The accreditation system in the US has evolved in response to the structural features of the vocational training system . Broadly, students in the US pursue a specific course or learning module and, on completing it to the satisfaction of the instructor and institution, are awarded a certain number of academic credits. These are aggregated until the student meets the institutional requirements for a diploma or certificate. The accreditation system appears

flexible, enabling transfer of credits between courses and institutions nationally, and sometimes internationally. For example, a recent decision of the national Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation determined Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Grenada and the UK to have comparable standards in terms of credits, although a number of other countries (for example, Egypt, the Netherlands, France and Switzerland) were deemed non-comparable.

In the US, the basic accreditation system is the responsibility of regional or national accrediting bodies in which representatives of both higher education and the professions participate. There are six regional and five national accrediting associations, plus around forty-three specialised accrediting associations controlled by professional associations such as the American Bar Association.

However, within the US Vocational-Technical Education System (Voc-Ed) there are few nationally validated and commonly used (across all states) skill standards, and there is little evidence of consistency in the level of education and occupational specialisation for which standards are being set. There are few examples of standardised portable 'credentials' that accompany national industry-validated standards.

In the US the major concern is to understand the scope of the roles of the federal government and the private sector in the development and implementation of skill standards. What, for example, are the best forms of assessment to use in skill standards systems; what testing guidelines could be used to achieve equal opportunities; and to what extent do the current apprenticeship and co-operative education systems provide a framework for setting national standards and consensual agreement on accreditation? For example, will agreed skill standards mean that employers will know what they are getting when they recruit employees who meet SCANS content model criteria?

There have been a number of significant proposals for changes to the US accreditation system in recent years, resulting in a drive by federal and state governments to impose closer regulation. As a result of the 1992 Higher Education Act, the federal government seeks to place extra responsibility for institutional compliance with federal regulations onto the accrediting agencies, and to establish state government responsibilities for performance standards. In response, many regional and specialised agencies have been reviewing their operations.

As part of the 1992 Act, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity was set up. Composed of 15 appointees from the education and training sector, this Committee advises the Secretary of State on enforcing standards in accreditation agencies; provides guidance on whether specific agencies should be recognised; provides inputs to the preparation of a list of recognised accrediting agencies; advises on the preparation of criteria for establishing standards, and on standards for higher education institutions.

Ultimately, accreditation in the US is driven by negotiation. Employers negotiate with professional bodies in order to impose their needs and agendas on curricula and standards. In

turn, these become mediated through the operations of the accreditation agencies. At the same time, the system of credit transfer in operation means that students and trainees are constantly negotiating the value of previously acquired credits with institutions they go to for continuing training. In response, accrediting agencies have loose guidelines and criteria (for example the Carnegie method) they apply to transferable credits to enable employers to obtain guidance on the value of credits submitted by job applicants. Having grown accustomed to this culture of negotiation the accreditation industry is resistant to the imposition of top-down regulation. There is a prevailing view among accreditation insiders that government-imposed standardisation will not work; that regulation is only relevant in instances where institutions are receiving federal aid (as in the Job Training Partnership Act), and in relation to fraud and abuse.

Notwithstanding the overwhelmingly private sector-led culture, the accreditation system is still having to respond to the new climate of federal responsibility, particularly with regard to the National Skills Standards Board. In this context, the US Department of Labour has been, since 1993, monitoring 19 states that have undertaken state-based skill standards programmes.

There is a consensus that the National Skill Standards Board (NSSB) should develop the framework and requirements for nationally recognised skill standards. This is an innovative development in a previously fragmented landscape. This common framework is perceived as essential to facilitate the standard-setting process through the use of standardised language and format. The future task is to set the criteria for recognition of valid accredited standards, which it is felt, should be bench-marked to international standards such as those promulgated by the International Standards Organisation.

It is accepted that the US will need a progressively complex set of levels of knowledge and skill mastery required for individual career entry and progression into the highest levels of a chosen career path. The need is therefore for the establishment of national common levels of qualifications. This establishment would comprise:

(a) establishing criteria for recognition of occupations that cross industries within broad based levels, units and elements would be identified so that individuals would have the opportunity to be assessed for competencies within a single level and accumulate credit over time and in different settings.

(b) procedures for bench marking to international standards and for upgrading and maintaining the skill standards continuously

(c) setting criteria and recognition procedures for organisations that develop standards

(d) establishing criteria sets that can be used to examine an industry group that voluntarily comes together to promote standards within an industry: criteria should include assurances that any such organisation recognised represents all aspects of the industry, that geographic representation exists and membership includes incumbent worker

(c) establishing criteria for broad based occupations that cross sectors: pooled representation from several industry groupings may be the most feasible approach so that the general and specialist skills required could be agreed

Once recognised or 'chartered' to develop standards an industry group would develop standards that meet validity and reliability criteria. The NSSB (a national agency) would act as the 'accreditor': accredited courses, procedures and modules would then be operationalised at national, state and local levels.

A problem which has been encountered and which is now being addressed concerns 'ownership' on the part of employers in organisations selected for standard setting and certification purposes. NSSB holds the view that without this sense of 'ownership' it would be difficult to persuade employers to share in the cost of development and maintenance of these procedures.

It is considered necessary to establish procedures which will ensure the security of individual records of persons and to develop a system which will ensure easy access to the standards themselves. Recognition of assessments and qualifications need to generated in a form that is easily recognised and is portable from one place to another across the country.

Skills standards provide an essential baseline of competencies that can be achieved within the workplace or in school-industry linked placements. The NSSB holds the view that it is education institutions which provide students with the theory and knowledge that will prepare students for the future. 'Related instruction' is required to help students be prepared for the evolving workplace. SCANS Skills are seen as having a high utility in this area for the education community as they can be used to aid development of the framework of a 'continuum of standards' that will be needed in the US economy.

The next major step for the NSSB, together with other agencies of the federal government, is to bring together the skills standards and credentials under a common framework that results in nationally recognised standards and portable credentials. This is viewed as a 'capacity building' effort which will bring the skills standard movement fully into the human resource development system in the US.

At the macro level, the American Training Standards Institute is currently working on skills and knowledge standards classification systems that can be used as validation filters to certify education and training. As part of this initiative, the STEPS (Skills, Training, Evaluation Process and Standards) Project is developing a knowledge system to manage skill standards infrastructure, a key component of which is electronic storage at the regional and national level of individual skill inventories, certificated training content and worker portability tracking. Smart cards are conceived of as the main vehicle for management of these data

5.5. Skills Profiling Systems

5.5.1. Overview

The STEPS project mentioned above highlights one of the key conclusions of this initial data gathering phase of the study: that personal skills card are themselves ineffective unless contextualised within an institutional and organisational framework that links the needs of workers to the needs of other stakeholders, including industry and government. This framework depends for its relevance and effectiveness on the development and operationalisation of a comprehensive taxonomy of skills-based occupational clusters that evolves and adapts to changing work patterns, and also an accompanying infrastructure to enable skills to be validated.

In the US there have been a number of ongoing initiatives intended to create a comprehensive taxonomy of occupational clusters, the most enduring of which has been the Dictionary of Occupational titles. The DOT has been bedevilled by a number of problems, chief of which has been its lack of adaptability. Developed in the 1930s in response to the recession as a means of helping the newly-created US public employment service place workers in jobs, the DOT is in book form, and comprises around 12,000 job descriptions and definitions in fixed, narrative format. As part of the package of measures associated with the 1994 Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the federal government initiated a radical assessment and overhaul of the DOT. Commissioned by the US Department of Labour, an Advisory Panel for the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (APDOT) was set up to assess national occupational information needs. The main recommendations of the Panel were to restructure the DOT to provide a database system that should provide a common language for all users of occupational information, but be sufficiently flexible to allow for further differentiation based on the continual collection of information. This should be implemented through regular surveys of employers and employees, primarily utilising structured job analysis questionnaires. In addition, the Panel devised a 'Content Model' that was intended to provide the basis for structuring the occupational database.

Building on the work of the Panel, the US Department of Labour has just completed initial development work on a comprehensive system for organising, describing and disseminating data on job characteristics and worker attributes. O*NET (Occupational Information Network) is intended to replace the DOT not only by delivering a more up-to-date set of occupational classifications, but by capturing new work processes, i.e. by operationalising an iterative, evolving knowledge base utilising data captured on a continual basis from strategic employers. In order to maximise its embeddedness within the continuously evolving US economy, O*NET is integrated within three related initiatives recently launched by the federal government:

(a) America's Job Bank - an on-line employment service that 'posts' job opportunities on the Internet

(b) School-to-Work - an initiative by the Department of Education to link secondary education with industrial training programmes, enlisting the involvement of major US employers

(c) ALMIS - statistical analysis of labour market information provided by federal, state and local suppliers.

5.5.2. Main themes derived from the Study

The rationale for focusing on how competence definition and accreditation is handled in the US was an underlying assumption that there is a degree of consonance between that country and how the structure of education and training in Europe is evolving. In some respects, there are indeed certain similarities between the US and Europe, and lessons from which, with regard to the 'vision' of a European Accreditation System, we can learn, but it should be stressed that comparisons between the federal US structure and an imagined 'federalised Europe' can be misleading.

One key area of similarity is the extent to which vocational training, competence definition and accreditation, can bear the imposition of federal, or 'top down' harmonisation. From the US experience, it is clear that there has been, and is likely to be in the future, intense resistance to a federalised accreditation system, for complex reasons associated with the nature of the US Constitution, the historical autonomy of state and local agencies in delivering education and training, and the power of professional organisations and employers. This strong resistance to top-down interference with state and local practices has meant that the federal government's role has largely been one of enabler.

Our preliminary assessment of attitudes towards standardisation of competence definition and accreditation procedures in Europe shows similar strong resistance, underpinned by underlying legal frameworks, to notions of harmonising European accreditation systems. Many of the working agreements in Europe over accreditation have evolved as a result of multi-lateral agreements within specific economic sectors between member states, accreditation bodies and professional associations, or as a result of cross-border collaboration between firms.

Conversely, there are key areas where US theory and practice bears little resemblance to what is the norm in Europe, or what is likely to work there. One obvious area is the position of employers and professional associations in training delivery and accreditation. In the US, through representation on bodies such as the Advisory Panel for the Dictionary of Occupational Titles; national and local Skills Standards Boards, and accreditation agencies, it is industry that effectively shapes the accreditation agenda and, through the localised vocational training provision infrastructure, it is industry that drives training. In Europe, the position of industry and professional associations is less dominant. Within this context, the development of a European Accreditation System would need to carefully consider questions such as to what extent is it desirable or appropriate to encourage training to be more industry-

led, and what kind of partnership arrangements between industry and other stakeholders are likely to facilitate the development of a European Accreditation System.

Overall, the study's preliminary findings strongly reinforce the notion of 'cultural patrimony' as a major obstacle to building the European Accreditation System. By this, we mean the socio-cultural, legal and institutional structures that have evolved in different states in the US, and in different member states in Europe, to shape the theories and practices of education and training. Such patrimonies are reflected in, for example, different pedagogic approaches to training and different pedagogic practices. To take an example, in the US, vocational training in healthcare professions like occupational therapy is mediated through local practice laws that in turn are shaped by factors such as whether there has historically been a dominant oral or written tradition in professional culture, and whether service provision is based on a health insurance or a social model of healthcare.

The power of these cultural patrimonies' was highlighted in the study through the focused case studies carried out. The initial results of the five pilot studies with O*NET that are currently being implemented via the US Department of Labour illustrate this. These pilot projects demonstrate clearly the necessity for tailoring and adapting the generic structure of O*NET, and its underlying content model, to particular socio-cultural and socio-economic locales. Thus, in California, O*NET is being used to track changes in work structure and practices associated with the growth of new digital and multimedia industries. In Minnesota, O*NET acts to some extent as a catalyst for stimulating the re-generation of a traditional economic base, by identifying existing skills within the workforce that can be deployed in new economic activities. In New York, O*NET is being used to strengthen the impact of School-to-Work initiatives, by stimulating school students to analyse their job expectations and think more realistically about possible career paths.

Early results emerging from these pilot projects are pinpointing cultural differences in the ways in which skills are defined and utilised in the different locales involved. These differences are articulated primarily in different interpretations of the skills required to do a particular job, and in the terminology used to describe the skills.

5.6. Integration

As indicated above, the vision of a European Accreditation System encompasses the integration of institutional and organisational infrastructure, supported by the parallel integration of technological infrastructure (personal skills cards, on-line testing software and systems to capture, synthesise and validate data on job characteristics and occupational attributes). However, a key lesson learned from the US experience is that integration needs to take place at the macro-level, i.e. by embedding skills within the broader context of economic and social activity, and specifically within the areas of secondary education, work-based learning and local and regional economic development.

The US experience clearly underlines the importance of thinking about integration in relation to how the European Skills Accreditation system is expected to build bridges at the macro-level between school, work and economic and social life themselves. Equally, it seems clear that ESAS could benefit considerably from a deeper examination of the potential of a system like O*NET to facilitate such integration. However, in a number of areas, notably the content model underlying these and other initiatives, these innovations are as yet embryonic, and will need considerable adaptation to the European context.

5.7. COMPETE

The COMPETE project is a preliminary exploration as to how a personal skills medium in association with a new approach to skills taxonomies could simultaneously contribute to resolving a number of economic and social problems, enhancing trans-national labour mobility while integrating new approaches to innovative skills, prior learning and on-line accreditation. The research will be concerned to explore the development of appropriate and effective taxonomies to define the domains of skilled performance: identifying new methods of auditing skills: understanding what forms of training are appropriate in addressing skills gaps particularly for excluded groups: understanding how skills can be represented so that they are intelligible to both workers and employers: exploring new institutional arrangements to promote collaboration (between government, trade unions, firms, training bodies) on skills definition and accreditation; and assessing the potential exploitation of IC technologies in promoting access to new training arrangements and competence definitions.

5.8. A portable skills medium and a skills database

In the current state of technological development, any PSM would essentially take the form of a portable interface onto an extensive database. In the most ambitious scenario, this would consist of a competency-based skills taxonomy, translated into the 15 or more EU national languages. Mapped onto this would be the analysed content of vocational qualifications and other inputs such as prior learning, the outcomes of non-formal learning, and on-line accreditation of skills taught and tested through electronic media. The skills profile of an individual would be generated by combining the skills content of their various qualifications and other certified skills outcomes. This would be accessible in variously organised and sorted forms. By organising an individual's skills according to generic criteria of competencies, the content of qualifications obtained under one sectoral vocational system or under one particular system of governance could be made comprehensible to employers or trainers familiar with a different one.

This implies the maintenance of a massive infrastructure of evaluation, certification, translation, accreditation, and defence against fraud and misuse. The justification for this investment is the need to facilitate labour mobility in a context where there are insuperable

barriers to the EU-wide standardisation of vocational training and accreditation. The nature of these barriers will be outlined below.

The different nations of Europe have developed different systems of education and training. Some nations have vocational qualifications including a higher level of general education, others a higher level of specialised theoretical knowledge, and others a more practical orientation. Some systems of VET are accredited by the state, others by employers' bodies, and others by systems originating in the guilds. In some nations many sectors have systems which are self-regulated or entirely unregulated. These differences in the formal nature of VET are themselves not likely to disappear rapidly But the different nations also have different systems of legislation and governance which mean that the skills needed for particular jobs are themselves intrinsically different. Depending on whether different nations' entire economic and social system is 'statist', 'corporatist' or 'market oriented', 'bureaucratic' or 'individualistic', their entire system of attribution of legal responsibility for the outcomes of production and distribution may be different. This leads to real differences in the bundling of skills and the lines along which labour is divided. There are other cultural factors which have influenced these processes, such as gendering and the dynamics of urban and rural development. It is therefore false to suppose that different VET systems are merely confusing labels for the same thing.

The aim of any EU-wide skills system cannot therefore be to produce equivalencies between the systems of different nations, but to give individuals documentation which facilitates their transition from one system to another. This leads to the notion of 'transparency', which means analysing qualifications into their component competencies. This has the additional advantage that the same procedure helps in two other directions. It can facilitate the movement of an individual from one economic sector to another, since the generic competencies bundled in a particular vocational qualification are made apparent. It can also help in identifying the ways in which new skills are evolving, and help trainers and policy makers plan for the training which they require.

But the creation of a such a skills database would not only serve to facilitate labour mobility. It would be of enormous value in a number of related areas. It could reduce the transaction costs of the labour market for both employers and employees. It could help to valorise the prior learning and skills of the socially excluded and of migrants. It could help firms to reconceptualise their skills base as an asset base. It could help firms, regions and nations audit and activate their skills base. It could map the development of new skills associated with new technologies, and provide information on trends. The implications of these possibilities will be developed below.

5.9. The problems of labour mobility and trans-national comparability of vocational qualifications

Over most of the last two hundred years there was a continuous movement of labour migration from southern and eastern Europe to the industrialised North-west. In the decades following the second world war, following the establishment of the Iron Curtain, there was a period of migration into this area from Southern Asia, North Africa, the Caribbean, Turkey, Yugoslavia, and what are now the southern states of the EU. Throughout these decades there was also continued migration from South to North within Italy and Spain. In recent decades all of these movements have slowed down or ceased. This may be related to the advent of massive waves of technological unemployment in the advanced countries. Previous waves of migrants were absorbed into semi-skilled employment in manufacturing, mining, transport and health care. In recent decades migrants, except those in the higher professions, have been absorbed, if at all, in unskilled labour or the retail sector. Net migration within the EU has been low. Movement of EU citizens from one state to another is mostly a lifestyle choice which contributes little to the dynamics of the labour market. It is generally agreed that large-scale movements within the EU from areas of high unemployment would not be of positive value, since they would overstrain the resources of the target areas and further reduce the social capital and skills base of the giving areas. Therefore although the EU is committed to facilitating labour mobility as an individual liberty, it might seem that in purely economic terms individual labour mobility is a low priority (cf. Adnett, Collinson).

The counter-tendency to this is the increasing trend towards the trans-national firm. The creation of a single European market means that following on from increasing exports to other member states, firms begin to think about locating production, distribution, maintenance and customer service functions in other states. Whether they do this by moving existing staff or by recruiting locally, they face the problems of incompatible regulation of skills accreditation. One of the case studies of COMPETE will be to look at the value of the PSM concept for firms operating across borders within Europe, particularly across the German-Benelux-French and German-Swiss-French borders. These will be firms which have grown up within one EU member state, or Switzerland, and have then extended their market into neighbouring areas, eventually needing to locate some activities in other states (some of these firms have previously been studied within the EURES project).

From the point of view of the labour market however, it is not very important whether these trans-national firms are European or non-European MNEs. American and Japanese investment in Europe, which was originally motivated by the need to circumvent import quotas, has recently been regarded as being increasingly driven by the need to adapt their production to the special features of the European market. This trend was welcomed by the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment, which stated: *For us the future lies in inward investment fully integrated in the local economy, with research, development, marketing and management functions located in Europe alongside manufacturing, sales and service. This indeed is the trend, not least because there has been a sharp rise in mergers and acquisitions as a proportion of overall foreign investment in Europe* (EC 1993 para 6.5 (h)).

One of the core uses of a PSM would therefore be to facilitate movement of labour within trans-national firms, and to ease problems of recruitment by such firms outside their 'home' nation. The first indications are that this would be particularly important in two areas: supervisory staff, and staff involved in processing materials. The PSM could be of value either by assuring employers that prospective employees do have the requisite skills, or by providing a skills profile which would indicate what additional training would be necessary either to employ a person or to deploy them at a site located in another state.

5.10. Contribution to social cohesion

The skills of migrants and marginalised groups are often devalued, and then, by disuse, destroyed. Because individuals are assigned to jobs on the basis of ascriptive characteristics, their potential contribution to society is lost or reduced (Collinson). A competency-based PSM system which was able to absorb input from both prior learning and vocational training acquired under other systems would reduce this attrition. Directly it would improve the individual's chance of appointment to an appropriate employment. Indirectly, through input into regional and national skills audits, it would reveal the existing level of wastage of the historical skills of marginalised people and motivate policies to reactivate them. One of the case studies of COMPETE will directly address this issue among migrant and returnee groups.

5.11. Achieving greater efficiency in the selection process

A fully operational PSM system could enable persons seeking employment, whether unemployed, studying or in training, or already in work, to obtain a listing of advertised jobs most closely matching their current skills profile. This could be used either to target job applications or to find out exactly which additional skills it would be most useful to acquire. A PSM profile would reduce the cost to employers of shortlisting from large numbers of applications. In the longer run, it would be possible to institute direct electronic matching of the profiles of job seekers and openings.

However, this is one of the areas in which a PSM system could be a danger unless it is implemented in a skills environment which is oriented towards upskilling. In a labour market with a tendency towards deskilling, a PSM system could be used to fill posts with persons having the bare minimum skills thought necessary for the work. There has been some research indicating that managers often underestimate the problem-solving skills necessary to effectively carry out 'low-skilled' work. One of the remits of COMPETE is to investigate the ability of economic actors to identify competence and skills gaps. The term skills gap is generally applied in one of two contexts. In the day-to-day labour market it designates a noticeable shortage of a particular kind of skill, due to inadequate supply or an increase in demand. In policy language, it is often used to imply that one country is or will be less able to compete internationally because of a shortage of the skills made necessary by new

technologies and methods. But there is an intermediate kind of skills gap, which can be identified by international comparison although it does not impinge on the consciousness of those involved and is therefore not perceived as a 'gap' but only as a natural state of things. For instance, researchers have identified efficiency differences between British and European manufacturers due to lower skill levels in Britain in areas where the British firms have no perception of a problem. This is because they have identified a particular process as 'low-skill' and have appointed or trained in line with this perception. German and Dutch firms have perceived the same process as more highly skilled and have established working patterns in which workers are able to resolve many problems before production is lost (Mason et al.). A PSM system with the British perception programmed into it would not help.

The reduction of labour market transaction costs would be a direct contribution to efficiency. This reduction might encourage some firms which currently operate internal labour markets to make more use of the open labour market, with further efficiency gains. Whether a PSM system would help upskilling depends on the wider environment of policy and perception.

5.12. Moving towards seeing the skills base as an asset

The general framework within which a PSM concept would have to be developed would be that envisaged by the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and innovation, which stated: *The promotion of non-physical, knowledge-based investment must be made the top priority of the general policy in support of investment. Training, research and know-how in general must be treated as proper targets of investment in their own right. The necessary consequences should be drawn notably as regards changes in tax and accounting rules.* (EC 1993 Chapter 2 para 2.3 conclusion point 3).

The theory behind these statements can be most easily accessed in the works of Porter, Nonaka and Takeuchi, and Boisot. A comparative advantage is a cost advantage, which in a free market will be based on availability; nations enjoy a comparative advantage in the production of those goods for which they have access to cheap inputs, which may be materials or labour, land or capital, knowledge or skills. A comparative advantage is a natural given fact, which may or may not be utilised. A competitive advantage is a real difference in the performance and productivity of one firm compared to another. Competitive advantage may be based on comparative advantage, but increasingly the only secure competitive advantage is that which is generated within the firm itself in the form of innovation and upgrading of skills and knowledge. Because innovative processes generally generate large amounts of tacit knowledge which is not easily transferable, but can only be acquired by participation, competitors cannot buy equivalent knowledge on the market, but must invest in a long-term process of replicating the processes of the market leaders by trial and error. The best way to market products is to involve all layers and sectors of the firm in all aspects of the development of new products, as this pooling of knowledge and experience both leads to insights which might be missed by specialist departments, and gives all participants familiarity with the product and the processes involved. In this model, skills are not something

to be acquired when necessary for insertion into a pre-determined production process. They have to emerge out of the firm's own innovative practices.

While this leads the firm to regard its knowledge and skills base as an asset base, it might also seem to reduce the firm's incentive to share knowledge with outside bodies. This means that collaboration by firms in the creation and updating of a competency-based skills taxonomy can probably only be obtained by the offer of useful knowledge in return. The US case studies suggest that between the area of specific processes which can protected by patents and the area of tacit knowledge which cannot economically be communicated at all there is an area of developments in skills where firms will exchange knowledge about their own innovative practices for information on more general trends.

The database underlying a competency-based PSM system would be an invaluable tool in auditing the skills base of firms, regions and nations. Skills audits and profiles would support government policy and corporate decision-making in identifying future skills needs, making appropriate training provision, and especially in envisaging alternative uses for stocks of skills which might be threatened by obsolescence in their current function.

On an individual level a PSM system could be programmed to be sensitive to the 'ageing' of skills and the need to reactivate them. Skills which might otherwise be lost by disuse could retain their value through appropriate in-service refresher courses or secondments to tasks where they are used again.

5.13. Mapping the development of new skills

The most salient process in the economic world today is the penetration of ICTs into all areas of activity. In recent decades computers have moved away from their role as the 'brain' within an organisation to constituting part of the environment with which organisations must interact. IT skills have become ubiquitous. There is a convergence of computing, telecommunications and media industries. These processes have created many new skills and made others obsolete. Genetic engineering, biotechnology, micro-engineering and fibre-optic cable are other developments each of which is redrawing the boundaries between economic sectors and creating new areas of skill. The management of ecological problems is seen as the next horizon of innovation which will lead to further such boundary shifts and skill innovations. It will be necessary to speed up the process by which new skills are formalised, disseminated and accredited.

The need for such new procedures was underlined by the White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment, which stated: *It is necessary to anticipate skills needs correctly and in good time by identifying the developing areas and the new economic and social functions to be fulfilled, as well as the skills required for them. Even if real-time adjustment is not possible (since a certain period of adaptation is inevitable), the organisation of as much research as is necessary in this area and the introduction of*

observation instruments and of mechanisms for transferring information collected to the education system should make it possible to minimise the gap between required and available skills. (EC 1993 para 7.4).

The US case study indicates that only an on-line skills database would be able to produce the necessary data on the demand for new skills and the training necessary to provide them. A transparency-based and competency-based skills database would also provide indications of how new technologies are leading to diversification or convergence of skills within and between economic sectors. This could help indicate the degree to which the skills needs of some sectors could be met by the transfer of comparable skills from declining or shrinking sectors.

5.14. The development of a European Skills Accreditation System

In the conclusion to their report on the American experience, Cullen and Jones contrasted two possible approaches to the development of a European Skills Accreditation System which would combine the transparency-based and competency-based approaches. They called these the 'Big Bang' scenario and the 'Evolutionary' scenario.

The 'Big Bang' scenario would involve the development of a comprehensive standardised content model, with common descriptors and lexicon, in effect a European equivalent of the O*NET. This would be the framework for establishing a unified system of equivalencies, not one-to-one equivalencies, but equivalencies of the itemised skills content of different qualifications and accreditations. The use of this system would be policy-driven and would require high-level political collaboration and investment.

The 'Evolutionary' scenario on the other hand would aim at the same objectives, but would be a bottom-up system driven by the priorities of partnerships between business, government and other social partners confronting real problems of trans-border and trans-national mobility and co-operation. This would allow for a period of parallel development of different methods and systems adapted for different circumstances. Out of these experiences it would be possible to derive a common model which would be less likely to overlook the special problems of particular sectors or regions as might be the case with a 'top-down' model.

(The institutional and sectoral inputs into the two possible scenarios are sketched in the diagrams on the following pages, adapted from those presented by Cullen and Jones pp.56 and 59)

Cullen and Jones concluded by recommending four sectors as being particularly interesting areas in which to work on pilot projects. These were: 1. the information technology/audiovisual sector, since this is the area of the strongest growth of new skills and knowledge; 2. healthcare, since this sector combines the application of high-level technologies and knowledge work with meeting the most basic human needs, and has a high level of

cultural specificity from one nation to another; 3. the automotive sector, since this has been in the forefront of developing on-line in-house training and accreditation; and 4. retail, the area of greatest employment growth, and which has historically been an area of low-skill, part-time and casual employment, and where the problems of mobilising the skills of those at risk of social exclusion are therefore highlighted.

The 'Evolutionary' scenario was seen as being the most likely road forward, in view of the enormous political and logistical problems involved in the alternative scenario. The COMPETE project is now working on studying some of the areas which were identified by the American report as being of particular interest and value in making progress towards a European Skills Accreditation System.

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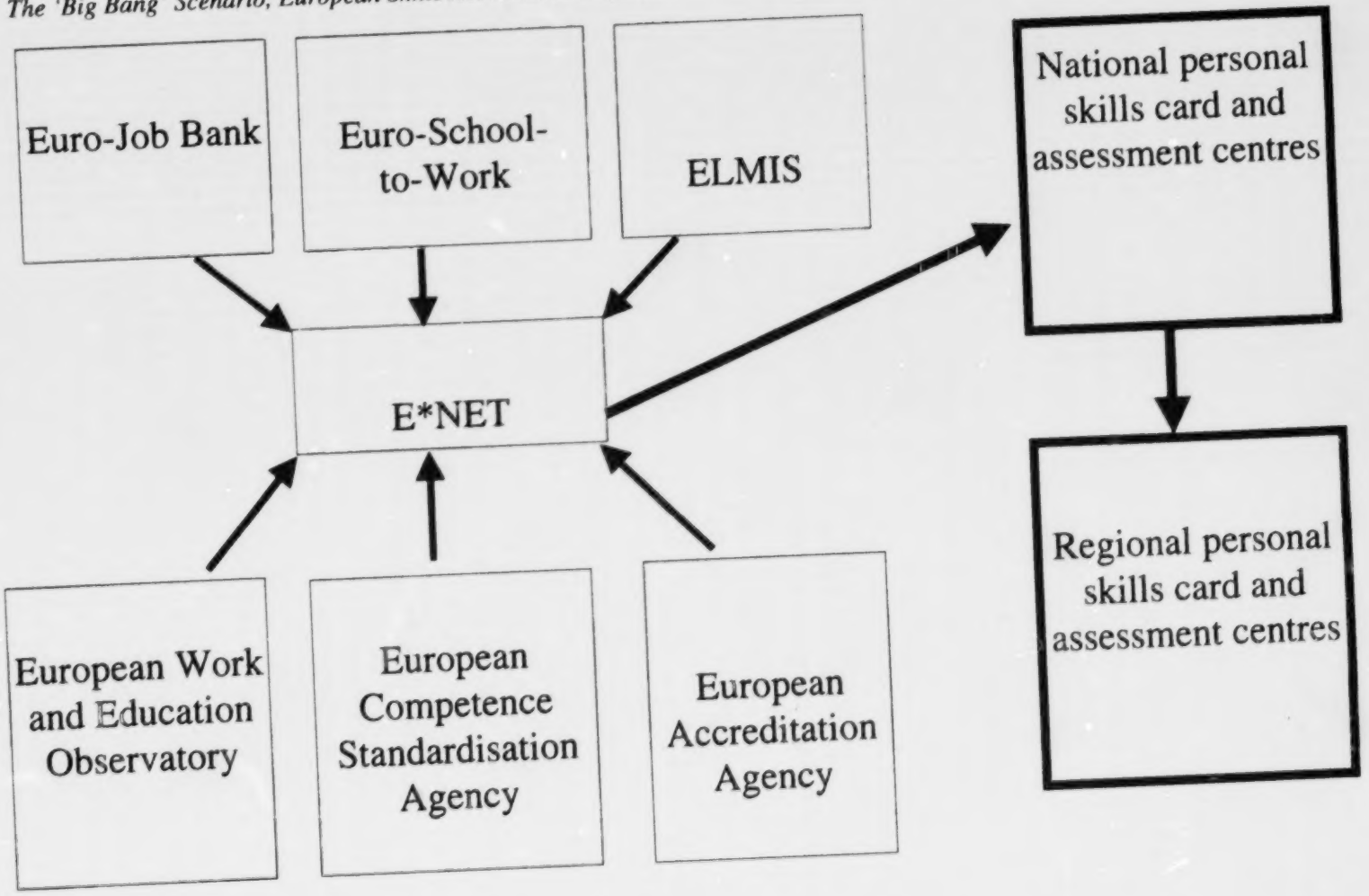
Graphic 1: The 'Big Bang' Scenario, European Skills Accreditation System



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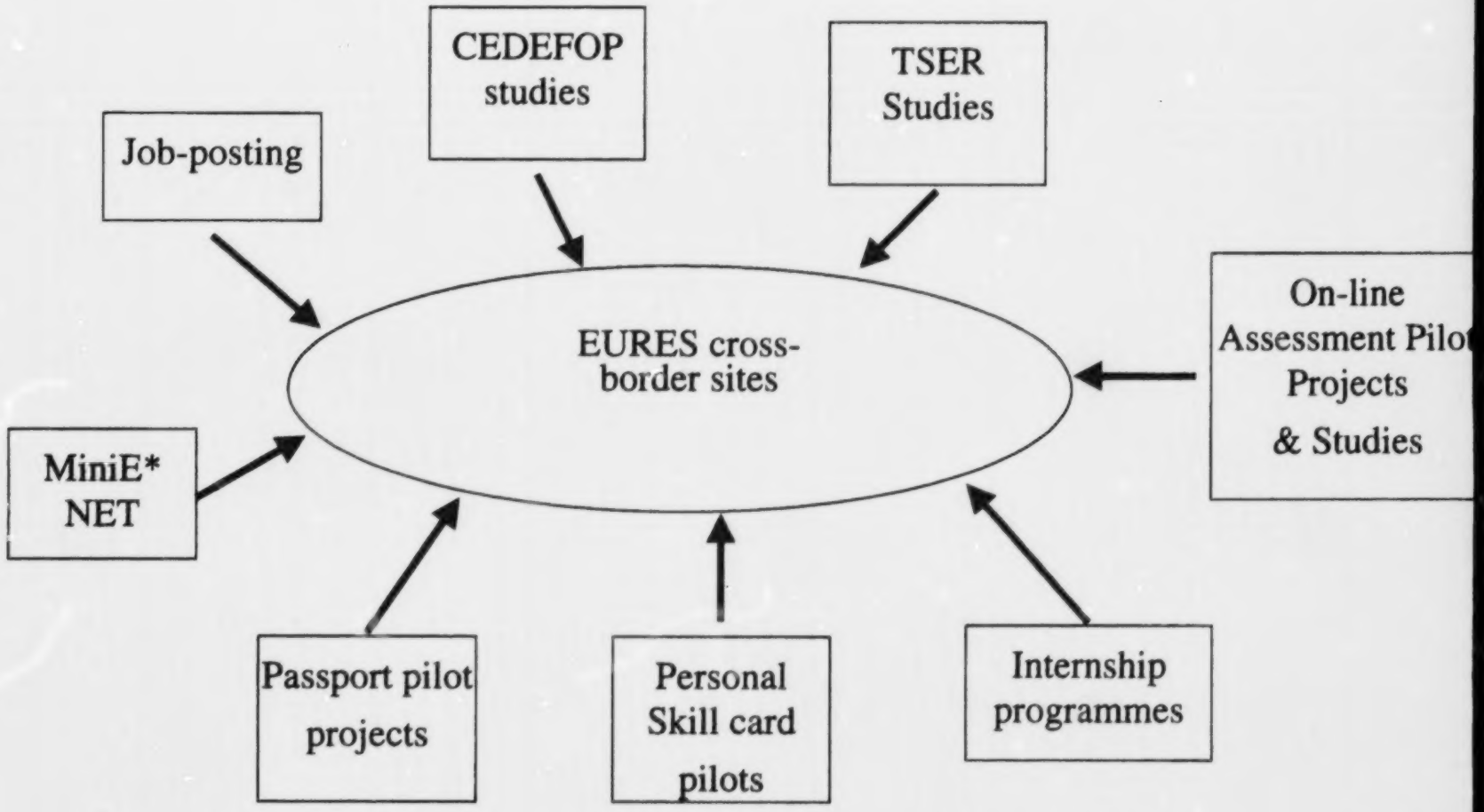
Graphic 2: Evolutionary Scenario, European Skills Accreditation System



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6. The recognition and validation of informal learning in France

Anne-Marie Charraud

The learning acquired by individuals has traditionally been recognised and validated after a period of training. The aim then is to verify whether all the 'knowledge' that trainees should have acquired during a period of learning, in particular the knowledge that is a formal part of a curriculum, has in fact been acquired. To do this, specific tests are organised to check whether the knowledge has been mastered, usually on a sample basis but sometimes in its entirety. It is in the French mentality to regard the final examination in a course, taken by all candidates at the same time irrespective of their geographical location and the practical form taken by the course (initial, continuing, alternance or distance training or even as individual candidates), as the ideal method of evaluation. The baccalaureate is the archetype of this model, and is seen as embodying the principle of objective, reliable social equity.

The development of courses with vocational aims, more specifically continuing and alternance courses, has led to new approaches to the assessment of learning, including the learning acquired formally in a training programme. They have planted the idea that general or vocational 'knowledge' could be acquired in places other than schools or training centres. At first this shift was gradual, in response to the demand of funding bodies (employers or public contracting institutions) who could not afford a very long course leading to the accreditation of learning. Later on, the idea gained credence that work situations could be used for learning and the acquisition of what might be regarded as 'knowledge' structured enough to be taken into account by the training world, so that part of the training path or even some of the examinations associated with official national certification could be dispensed with.

In France the recognition and accreditation of 'informal' or 'experience-based' learning are based on official benchmarks, and in some cases – such as national certification – on negotiations between social partners ([33]). Experience is also taken into account when a potential recruit negotiates with a future employer, but the rules and conditions for according such recognition have not as yet been regulated or put on a formal footing.

([33]) This is the case with most diplomas, certain accredited certifications, especially those awarded by ministries, and certificates for branches of industry.

6.1. Institutional practices for the validation of experience-based learning

6.1.1. The benchmarks used to validate experience-based learning

As in any validation process, the assessment of individual learning calls for an evaluation and appreciation by comparison with a benchmark (or requirement). Two types of benchmark are used at present: certification requirements created for the validation of learning after a training process, and competence requirements defined by employers for their specific needs.

In the validation of prior learning, the institutionalised processes relate essentially to the former types of benchmark. In a recent debate organised by the French employers' association (MEDEF) last October, the conclusion was that the validation of competences was the responsibility of the 'enterprise', the only body in a position to specify what it needed. According to this approach, based on benchmarks constructed by the enterprise itself or by experts designing specific tools and methods for this purpose, a wide variety of practices was also observed.

We shall discuss here only the measures that have been institutionalised by ministries or other authorities.

6.1.2. The objectives pursued in validating experience-based learning

The various measures in existence have been established to meet four separate aims.

(a) To waive the prerequisites for admission to a training course

This practice is applicable to most training measures that entail admission selection criteria. If certain prerequisites have been stated as essential for admission to a course, a scheme for the validation of experience-based learning means that those prerequisites can be waived (as in the case of certain courses in the health sector or in social work). The same principle applies to schemes waiving training requirements in implementation of the 1985 Law on the accreditation of vocational prior learning for higher education, as well as the many continuing training courses leading to accredited certifications. The validation methods range from the taking of tests to the compilation of a dossier, interviews and even examinations.

(b) To exempt candidates from part of the training path leading to official certification

This practice has evolved in line with developments in continuing training. The purpose of such a waiver is the attempt to rationalise the financial and human cost by allowing tailor-made training pathways for individuals or groups who have already acquired certain parts of their training. As an example one might mention the AFPA scheme for the evaluation of competences and vocational learning (*évaluation des compétences et des acquis professionnels* - ECAP). This can be used, following test- and interview-based

assessment, to dispense with part of a training course leading to an Employment Ministry certificate, or even the whole of the course except for a consolidated module prior to the final tests in the examination validating vocational competences (*examen de validation des compétences professionnelles* - EVCP). This is also a common practice in continuing training, irrespective of the bodies by which it is organised. In the minds of training professionals, it indicates a gradual move towards the next step: dispensing with tests altogether for the award of certification.

(c) To waive the tests leading to the granting of certification

This is a far more recent practice in France: not until 1992 did a Law (the Aubry Law) open up this opportunity for diplomas awarded by the Education Ministry and the Agriculture Ministry ([34]). Since 1992, it has been possible for anyone with five years' work experience to gain exemption from examinations for the granting of diplomas. The procedure requires the candidate to describe his activities during this period of experience so that a board can determine whether what has been learned would normally be expected of someone aiming at the diploma. All diploma units may be granted except one.

This kind of arrangement has been in operation since 1994 for national education diplomas (secondary and higher) and since 1996 for CNAM. It has been in place since 1988 for Agriculture Ministry diplomas, and should be introduced in 1999 for the diplomas awarded by the Ministries for Youth and Sport.

(d) The award of certification promoting transparency on the labour market

Measures designed to meet this aim are currently being tried out, in two types of institution:

(i) The Employment Ministry, through the award of *certificats de compétences professionnelles* (CCP – certificate of vocational competence). These certificates, constructed around actual employment benchmarks, is also structured by reference to the titles awarded by that Ministry. The competences assessed are related to those described by the *Répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois* (ROME - Operational List of Trades and Jobs), used by the *Agence nationale pour l'emploi* (ANPE – National Agency for Employment) in order to match the supply of jobs with the demand. The measure is available to both jobseekers and employees. The CCPs awarded thus promote transparency on the labour market and, at the same time, offer exemption from the requirement to follow training paths leading to certificates linked to a qualification. The possession of knowledge is assessed by means of tests, and in particular by evaluation in a work situation (real or simulated).

([34]) There has, however, been an exception since 1934 in the form of one particular measure allowing engineering candidates with substantial professional experience to become *ingénieurs Diplômés d'État* (DPE). Evidence of their qualifications takes the form of submitting a memorandum complying with certain standards. A dozen or so candidates take advantage of this procedure each year.

(ii) The Chambers of Commerce and Industry, through the award of *certificats de compétences d'entreprises* (CCE – Enterprise certificates of competence). The procedure applies principles based on NVQs. The benchmarks have been formulated in close cooperation with employers. Learning is evaluated in the light of results in a work situation, using specially 'certified' assessors.

The moves promoted by the various government plans to reduce unemployment have been a marked incentive for reflection, analysis, methodology and experimentation concerning the relationship between training and work. The involvement of sectors of the economy in the process of certification following an alternance or continuing training path is helping to develop the moves. The evidence of the structuring role of work experience in building up a job identity is encouraging far closer links between the workplace and the world of training. The transparency of experience-based knowledge, using the same benchmarks as in training, is helping to strengthen those links.

6.2. The debate on the validation of experience-based learning

Although the principle of taking work experience into account in order to shorten the training itinerary is relatively widespread in most continuing training schemes, the idea of waiving examinations leading to certification marks a sort of cultural revolution in France. Six years after the Law institutionalising that practice, it must be admitted that it has been little applied. In the field of national education, for example, only just over 4 000 people have acquired their secondary education vocational diplomas, about a thousand their diploma in higher education and a few dozen people have such diplomas awarded by the Ministry of Agriculture. These modest results may be due to the major preliminary steps that have to be taken beforehand. These can be summarised by three points.

6.2.1. The nature of the solutions introduced by validation measures

The decision to rely on those certification benchmarks that have previously been used in validating knowledge acquired by training reflects an attitude that is all the more legitimate in the French context, i.e. that 'qualification' is attested by 'certification'. The level of certification is generally cited as a criterion for classification in national collective agreements, and it is natural that an effort should be made to offer access to as many people as possible in order to improve the general qualifications of French citizens and employees. Today such qualifications are still transparent across industries and sectors and nationwide. They stand for their holders' qualifications for jobs in a more or less extensive range of work situations in a relatively wide variety of organisational settings, and they demonstrate their holders' potential ability to adapt to change over the medium term, possibly long term in certain cases.

Nevertheless, this type of benchmark does not always reflect the aims of employers or individuals, who seek the transparency of skills or competences with a view to finding areas

of employability to which they can gain immediate admission. Their reasoning in the management of skills is often directed towards the reorganisation of production methods. The Ministry of Employment's CCP schemes and the CCE schemes developed by the Chambers of Commerce and Industry are designed along these lines. The benchmarks refer to combinations of significant competences, designed for far more context-specific jobs than those used in establishing 'qualification' benchmarks. Although there are certain factors in common with certification testifying to a 'qualification', the combination applies to more limited fields and testifies to the immediate ability to operate. This information is particularly useful for employees or jobseekers whose knowledge has never been certified. For some people, it is a 'first step' towards 'qualification' and also, no doubt, towards social recognition, provided that this has been previously planned or negotiated.

The great expansion in schemes set up by private operators, especially those using computerised and automated media due in particular to the incentive of Europe, may also aim at the transparency of experience-based learning. The fields of transparency that they offer refer to very different objectives. Usually they testify to knowledge specific to a discipline, to a technique or to special abilities linked with products or the use of tools whose procedures are standardised in accordance with given performance criteria. This information is of real importance to an individual or to an employer who needs a guarantee of specific knowledge and skills. In no circumstance, however, can it replace the information provided by certificates drawn up to attest to knowledge and skills and the ability to combine them in different contexts.

6.2.2. The difficulty of constructing procedures for the assessment of experience

It is far harder to formalise the assessment of what has been learned through experience than it is in the case of training-based knowledge. In the latter case, the knowledge to be assessed is already known, as it is covered by the learning plan drawn up for what are often homogenous groups of people. By verifying the acquisition of elements learned in a formal setting, a reasonably accurate assessment can be made of what the candidate actually knows without the risk of under-estimation, within the limits of the psychological and emotional context of examination situations. Work experience is acquired in different contexts, and what is learned does not necessarily relate to a preset corpus of knowledge. The 'informal' dimension entails two major risks: identification of knowledge that cannot be transferred to the broader contexts envisaged by the training benchmarks; and the under-estimating of an individual's knowledge, in that the evaluation procedures do not allow for defining the actual contours of that knowledge.

It was for this reason that the Education Ministry developed a specific assessment method based on detailed information provided by the candidates about their actual work. They are required to produce a dossier setting out a description of their activities, which is then referred to by a board in order to identify the knowledge that is relevant to the diploma benchmarks. In writing up a description of this kind a candidate has to analyse and view in perspective, and

must be involved in the process. Although the procedure can be used to assess a broad spectrum of knowledge and to analyse a whole variety of combinations, candidates often view the approach as cumbersome and restrictive. The 'reliability' of this declaration is also questioned, in that it is in itself 'informal' and the validity of the statements made is viewed with suspicion, since the candidate produces his dossier outside a regulated area. The Agriculture Ministry has, however, solved the problem by organising special days when candidates are brought together in the same place to compile their accreditation dossier.

The application of a procedure of this kind and its extension to other forms of certification are all the harder if the benchmarks used to 'read' experience-based learning are in fact the training benchmarks. Up to now the natural tendency among planners has been to write training programmes and even to establish as many benchmarks as there are paths, since most of them have formerly been, or still are, trainers.

Only those benchmarks laid down for the secondary education pathway, from the CAP to the BTS, can be used to see the training objectives in terms of context-specific vocational activities on the one hand and, on the other, the skills and knowledge assessed at the end of the pathway by diploma units. This 'reading' calls for a delicate exercise on the part of the planners. A new methodology set up for the construction of diplomas along these lines in 1990 may be applied in various ways depending on the operators involved in the national committees responsible for the benchmarks ([35]). The current pressure for the development of schemes for the validation of experience-based knowledge is promoting the search for new techniques for the writing of benchmarks. This is the case with the Employment Ministry's certificates, and other Ministries are conducting experiments along the same lines. Nevertheless, a few years will no doubt go by before the new benchmarks are established and the benchmark planners adopt this new tecnique of writing.

All these elements have without doubt contributed towards a review of the implementation of the 1992 Law on bases other than writing up a dossier. The Employment Ministry, in common with the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has opted for an assessment scheme based on a package of tests on 'results'. These are provided by observations in actual (or sometimes simulated) work situations and a set of other items testified by third parties.

6.2.3. The legitimacy and credibility of the validators of experience-based knowledge

This is an entirely new factor in the French context. Up to now the credibility and legitimacy of the people who assessed and validated learning were taken for granted. The regulations on the processes of validating training-based learning entrusted the establishments responsible for training with arranging the assessments. The process of certification is, moreover, an integral part of training, 'sanctioning' the training path. The 'academic knowledge' and the 'competence' to be assessed are both evaluated by trainers, who are not the same as those who

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([35]) A review is being conducted of this methodology, to standardise practices for all Education Ministry boards.

have imprated the knowledge and competence but their peers. Vocational skills and their practical dimension are assessed by trainers in conjunction with working 'professionals', who may sometimes be representatives of the social partners and designated by them for certain types of certification, for instance those organised by the Employment Ministry.

The 'boards' validating experience-based knowledge are generally appointed on the same basis, with special training being given to the people involved. It would be impossible to contemplate such an arrangement unless there is a genuine political resolve. The Education Ministry has assigned this mission to the Rectorates and has set up a specific area in each establishment for secondary-level education. CNAM has established a specific department, side by side with its guidance department. In universities, because of their autonomous status, it is the President who has the task of performing this mission. At present, practices differ widely from one university to another. The other ministries are currently trying out separate schemes, each one based on agencies associated with the kind of training over which they have authority.

Even so, the principle of a public 'service' for the validation of experience-based learning has not yet been actually established throughout the country, at least for all the government operators likely to be involved. One reason is that such measures are relatively costly in terms of preparation and performance. As of this date, financial responsibility for the costs incurred by such a service is still linked with the responsibility for training. But experience cannot be treated on a par with training, and no budget support can be provided within the context of public-sector services. The schemes are being implemented so far only with funding for experiments in this field. No doubt we shall have to wait for the new Law on vocational training currently being drafted to come into effect before a solution can be found.

The stance adopted by the Chambers of Commerce and Industry is based on the British experience, which offers a global solution to this situation. Evaluation is conducted by 'assessors' who have been given 'authority and legitimacy' by the system (after training and certification) to perform the work. The 'system' itself is built on the principle of a chain of assessors as laid down for NVQs. An association has, moreover, been set up to perform the role of 'awarding bodies'. It will have to be 'certified' by an outside agency so that it will itself be recognised as legitimate in the field of individual certification. The cost of services are then borne by the clients.

6.3. Conclusion

Taking individual experience into account may have a major role to play in constructing the most suitable training pathways for employers and their problems, at the lowest cost. Nevertheless, today this is still very limited. The concern for the recognition and validation of prior learning may lead to a demand for recognition in terms of pay and promotion which the employer has not envisaged. This is no doubt one of the reasons for the small proportion in France of continuing training schemes directed towards certification (fewer than 10% of all

the schemes implemented each year). The training pathways arranged with the objective of leading to a certification require an average of at least 600 hours' training per course, and this is far too much for an enterprise ([36]).

Training measures financed out of public funds (in particular national and regional budgets) rarely lead to the award of a certificate, either because no such certificates exist that reflect the needs of the individuals being supported, or because certification has not been envisaged. This is why a search is proceeding for a means of rationalising the training investment (if not the costs) of certain regional operators. It is with this in mind that schemes are being developed to monitor the individuals being supported through 'skills portfolios' or 'skills audits'. Recent schemes have attempted to create links between this kind of approach and the institutional processes for the validation of this learning. This assumes that common languages have been established and that there is a general desire for mutual transparency, something that is always hard to achieve nationwide in a country whose institutions are unaccustomed to working together. In the French context, we shall have to await the major changes and moves towards such transparency that will be introduced by a Law reforming the legislation on continuing training in the year 2000. The issue of the recognition and validation of prior knowledge should be tackled fairly and squarely in that Law.

([36]) Employee training amounts to an average of 45 hours a year.

7. Finnish competence-based qualifications - Organization, assessment and legitimacy

Petri Haltia

While there has been, and maybe still is, strong faith in the advantages of formal education and training in Finland, in recent years non-formal learning has also received growing attention. So far, perhaps the clearest indication of this is the development of competence-based qualifications (CBQs). This paper presents the structure and organization of the system and comments on issues concerning assessment and legitimacy.

7.1. Structure and organization

Competence-based qualifications (in Finnish 'näyttötutkinto') were created by the Vocational Qualifications Act (306/1994), which came into force in 1994. It is now, with minor changes, included in the new Act on Vocational Adult Education (631/1998). The Act sets the legal framework for skills tests open to all adults, regardless of how they have acquired their occupational skills (whether in educational institutions, at work, by self-study or by some other form of activity). By passing these tests adults can obtain an officially recognised qualification. ([37]) However, according to the educational authorities, the purpose is that most of the candidates attend preparatory training before the tests to fill in the gaps in their skills. One of the goals of the system is to make vocational adult education more relevant and efficient. The aim is also to raise the educational level of adults, to narrow the generation gap in educational attainment and to install a national quality assurance system covering the whole field of vocational adult education.

There are three kinds of certificates: vocational qualifications, further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications. Vocational qualifications correspond to the basic qualification at youth level in terms of structure, objectives and eligibility for further studies. Candidates should demonstrate they have the basic professional skills required in the field concerned. Completion of further vocational qualification indicates that the person has the skills and competence required of a skilled worker. A specialist vocational qualification indicates mastery of the most demanding job skills in the field in question. The qualifications give access to occupations mostly at skilled-worker level. Among them are traditional occupations, such as carpenter or baker as well as new ones like media assistant or telecommunications technician. These qualifications are official and protected so that only

([37]) The term 'qualification' in this paper is defined as: 'An official record (certificate, diploma) of achievement which recognises successful completion of education or training, or satisfactory performance in a test or examination' (CEDEFOP 1998).

titles earned through qualifications completed according to the Act may be used. There are currently over 300 competence-based qualification titles, about 70 of which are vocational qualifications, 150 further and little more than 100 specialist vocational qualifications.

The Ministry of Education determines the number and titles of the qualifications. Decisions are, however, based on the suggestions of the social partners and the National Board of Education. The NBE is an expert agency responsible for the development of education aims, content and methods and also assists the Ministry of Education in preparing education policy decisions.

The national guidelines for the qualifications, which determine the skills candidates shall demonstrate to obtain a certificate, are drawn up by groups of experts appointed by the NBE, which approves and publishes them. Qualifications usually consist of four to eight modules which can be assessed separately, some of which may be optional. The guidelines only provide very general instructions for preparing the tests and assessment. For example, the criteria for assessment may include the speed and quality of work, but without any detailed instructions on how quickly something should be done or how the quality should be defined. A more detailed definition of the requirements is left to those drawing up the actual tests and the assessors.

The NBE also appoints examination boards. These boards are responsible for the organization and supervision of the skills tests and include representatives from employers, employees and teachers. They do not, however, arrange the tests themselves, but make contracts with institutions (usually educational institutions) which have the necessary resources and expertise. The selected institutions then arrange the tests although the boards sign the certificates and may, if necessary, participate in the planning of the tests. There are at the moment about 250 examination boards, each with nine members at most. The qualifications and geographical area covered by the boards are decided by the NBE.

The skills test is defined by educational authorities in such a way that almost any means to verify the skills of the candidate are possible. In practice, the aim is to draw up tests which correspond as far as possible to the conditions and tasks the candidate carries out at the workplace. For example, written or oral tests are normally used only if they are characteristic of the occupation concerned or if either due to lack of resources or the nature of the competence assessed – it is not possible to assess in any other way. In short, the intention is that candidates do in the tests what they would do in employment.

The tests usually take two to five days. They may be held at the candidate's own work place, at some other work place willing to take candidates or at the institution organising the tests, in which case they try to create conditions as authentic as possible. The last alternative is the most common. It is also possible to obtain the qualification or part of it without attending the tests upon presentation of a portfolio. This can include, for instance, work samples or a description of the tasks and skills of the person concerned submitted by the employer. However, this option is seldom used at the moment.

Institutions organising the tests can either prepare them by themselves or order ready-made tests from an institution, or rather a project (ALVAR), specialised in developing tasks for the skills tests and maintaining a testbank. This project is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and the European Social Fund.

Proponents of testbanks say that central planning of test items with the best expertise available ensures the quality and consistency of tests throughout the country. It may also be more economical and eases the work of the organizing institutions. For those organising the tests, it is sometimes difficult to understand exactly what the developer of the task has in mind. When tests are planned from the beginning by those who also draw them up, no such problem exists. The organisers also know what kind of equipment and other resources they have and how to make the best use of them. There are misgivings that a centralised system cannot react to changes in working-life quickly enough and that ready-made test-tasks may lead to inflexibility in arranging the tests. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that the tests developed in educational institutions are kept up-to-date and constantly developed.

The are no official rules concerning assessors, although they should of course be experts in the branch concerned and have sufficient up-to-date practical experience. Preferably, not only teachers but also some experienced workers should be among the assessors.

In 1997, about 7 500 persons attended the skills tests with about 70% awarded a qualification. Success rates varied much in different sectors; in some, the proportion of those obtaining the qualification was well below 50%. Most of the candidates did, however, pass at least one module. Exact figures for 1998 are not yet available, but it is estimated that about 10 000 persons got a qualification. Given that about 1.5 million Finns attend some kind of adult education annually, the figure is not very significant, although when compared, for example, to the amount of university degrees achieved annually (16 000), it seems bigger.

As the figures above indicate, the rate of failure is quite large, about 30% failed to get a qualification. On the other hand, most of the candidates passed at least one module. As already mentioned, qualifications usually consist of four to eight modules. For those candidates who come to the tests from working life, with no or little preparatory training, this is sometimes too much. The question is, what kind of non-formal learning should be assessed and recognised and especially how broad the competence of the candidate should be to earn the recognition. In some occupations, workers specialise so they master some of the modules, but very few master all of them. In order to pass the whole test, candidates need some kind of further training, and of course educational institutions recommend their own courses. On the other hand, this is in accordance with one of the goals of the system: raising the skill level of the workforce. Candidates are sometimes disappointed because they consider themselves representatives of the occupation concerned and furthermore, highly skilled in their own field. If they acquire the broader competence required, they probably have no use for it in their own work. They feel that keeping up to date in their own narrow area of specialisation requires constant effort and learning. In a state of unemployment, the broader competence probably could be of use but those who have good and secure jobs are not too concerned about that.

(Haltia & Lemiläinen 1998) . It is also possible to get a certificate for individual modules of the qualification, but for the moment it is the whole qualification that is really appreciated. It can be said that the modularity of the qualifications is neither fully understood nor its possibilities utilized.

While the CBQs are for the most part clearly tied to occupations, they can be considered inappropriate in the light of theories (e.g. Post-Fordism) which emphasize changes in working life: structures of the labour market becoming more blurred, changing job demarcations, need for multiskilling and so on. Modularity is a strategy which may make the system more dynamic. Although there is no single definition of the term module, the definition by Raffe (1994) is illustrative: 'A module is a relatively short unit of the curriculum which is self-contained in the sense that it can be delivered and assessed separately, and which may be combined in different ways with other modules.' With regard to Finnish CBQs, it should be noted that the national guidelines for the qualifications are not actually curricula, but rather descriptions of tasks and competence. Length of studies is thus not defined and preparatory training study times for a module can vary depending on the prior skills of the student.

Modularity is perceived to offer a number of benefits: to make VET more flexible and responsive to changing skills needs; to enable more account to be taken of individual differences and needs; to increase efficiency and so on. The critics, however, state that modularity leads, e.g., to fragmentation of learning, excessive concentration on short-term skills needs and lack of interest in generic skills. (See Howieson 1996.) Sellin (1994) concludes that modularization of vocational training can by no means replace systematic comprehensive initial training, but can supplement it.

Finnish CBQs are modular, at least in principle. It is possible to choose single modules from different qualifications to suit the individual needs of workers and enterprises. In practice, this opportunity has not been used much as most of the candidates aim at one, whole qualification. The provision of preparatory training and the tests has not focused enough on taking individual modules. If and when the whole qualification is really appreciated for individual needs and flexibility, it is important that there are possibilities for choice within the qualifications. Some of the CBQs do include optional modules and there are thus several possible combinations of modules which lead to the qualification. Over half of the qualifications, however, consist only of compulsory modules. (Haltia & Hämäläinen 1999) .

Educational authorities in Finland now strongly recommend the use of modularity in training as well as in the organisation of skills tests for CBQs. People should have flexible opportunities to prepare themselves for individual modules and to take them separately, not necessarily always the whole qualification at once. This is important for adults for whom it is often difficult to engage in long-term learning projects. The prerequisite is that the modules really are independent so they can be assessed separately and, in order to be attractive to candidates, individual modules should have some value of their own in the labour market.

7.2. Assessment

Assessment in the Finnish system is supposed to be criterion referenced and competence based. The performances of the candidates should not be compared to each other but to the competence criteria set in advance. The guiding principle of competence-based assessment is to clarify what one is assessing and what someone has achieved, so that a qualification conveys specific information about what someone is able to do (Wolf 1995, 72). Competence-based training and assessment systems are often accused of atomising and fragmenting learning in assessable chunks and, instead of encouraging critical reflection and creativity, offering a monocultural view based on narrow performance criteria. (e.g. Hyland 1995, 52). This kind of critique does not really apply to the Finnish skills tests. Organisers of the tests try to design large tasks which form an integrated whole. Assessors emphasise that they look at the performances of the candidates as a whole, not only details. As experienced professionals, they also appreciate creativity and originality within the limits of what is realistic considering practices in working life. They base their decisions on what they know about the requirements in working life and not only on the criteria they are given. Consequently, this assessment is not completely unambiguous and transparent as is expected. In practice, realism is needed as it is not clear exactly what those who get the qualification know and are able to do. (Haltia & Hämäläinen 1999) .

Some skills seem to be especially difficult to assess. Almost everybody agrees social skills (and other generic skills, key skills, etc.) are important and best developed non-formally, outside formal training. In all the guidelines for Finnish CBQs, it is stated that they should be assessed. However, if the question is not expressly about a service sector occupation, the assessment of social skills is easily left undone or their weight remains minor. Many organisers and assessors believe no reliable methods to assess them exist, at least when limited resources are taken into account. However, others believe social and other generic skills are overemphasised. Mäkinen (1998) says we must reject the thought that we do not need technical skills anymore. For example, at the hairdresser, it is still important what the customer's hair and ears look like after the haircut. Only after that does the barber's customer service skills or civilised conversation about the weather or literature have some significance. The importance of these skills, like many aspects of occupational competence, is something that cannot be defined merely by analysing work and occupations but something that has to be decided by the parties involved.

Contradictory to the principles of competence-based assessment, assessors sometimes compare the candidates to each other. Especially when they serve as assessors for the first time, they are somewhat hesitant in making their final decisions. They like to see the performances or work samples of all the candidates before they make their final judgements. The overall skill level of the group of candidates or a couple of exceptionally skilled candidates may thus affect decisions determining where precisely the pass/fail boundary will be. In general, assessors seem to want - perhaps based on their experiences at school - to put the candidates in order, to define who is the best and who is the worst.

This touches on the larger question of reliability and consistency of assessment over time and place. One way of striving for consistency is to make national guidelines more precise and detailed; the central testbank is another. This kind of action alone is not the solution - assessor networks are also needed to ensure consistency of judgement. Assessors should form a close network to share ideas and interpretations and in that way develop a common understanding (Wolf 1995).

It is also clear that qualifications and tests do not exist in a social vacuum. Wolf (1995, 125) has put this well: 'Competence-based systems as they are actually implemented are only to a limited extent shaped by the underlying theory of assessment. Political considerations, social dynamics, workplace organization, cost and the previous experiences and ideas of individual assessors all play as important a role'. An example of social dynamics, or rather social pressure connected to the skills tests in Finland, is the comment of one of the teachers interviewed by Haltia and Lemiläinen (1998): 'If most of the candidates pass the test, people say that the tests were probably easy, and if most of the candidates fail the test, people say that the preparatory training was no good'. All in all, it is unlikely that a situation where all or none of the candidates continuously pass the tests would be tolerated. The requirements will probably soon be changed, irrespective of what they first were.

7.3. Legitimacy

Saunders (1995, 214) states that there is no sense in a system which simply leaves the working population with precisely the skills they already have, even if they are able to produce a certificate to show that this is the case. The arguments (justifications) for the Finnish system indeed emphasise its impact on skills upgrading: the system would motivate people to develop their occupational skills because in order to get a qualification they could study independently or participate in training only to the extent that it is really needed (no 'time serving' is required). It is also believed that the qualifications and skills tests, which would correspond to the needs of working life, would force vocational adult education to become more relevant and efficient. Bjørnåvold (1997a), on the other hand, sees benefits in accounting for existing competencies. 'Keeping stock' of competencies provides a basis for their use and allocation and benefits individuals, enterprises as well as society as a whole. But Bjørnåvold (1997b) also emphasizes the aspect of legitimacy and its influence on the actual value of assessments.

After the Vocational Qualifications Act came into force the Ministry of Education appointed a workinggroup, which consisted of representatives of some interest groups, to follow the implementation of the act. In its report (OPM 1996), the representatives shortly presented the views of their reference groups. According to the report, it is important for employers to have accurate information on the skills of the workers so that this can be taken into account at recruitment and also in the further development of skills and human resource management in general. Traditional qualifications are not considered very good in this respect and accurate and relevant information is exactly what is expected of the CBQs. It is also pointed out that in Finland neither the employers nor the employees are used to take part in the planning and

organisation of public education and training. However, participation of the social partners in developing and implementing the CBQs system is absolutely necessary.

For employers, it is maybe of secondary importance where the workers have acquired their skills, whereas employees' representatives stress that CBQs offer a new possibility for workers as skills acquired at work or by self-study can now be converted into officially recognised qualifications. This enhances equality in working life and also mobility. The beneficial effects of passing exacting tests for self-esteem is also pointed out.

Teachers are perhaps a bit sceptical. It is clear that talk about the significance of non-formal learning can be seen as undermining their work and in that sense as a threat. Teachers want a clear position in the system and in the report (OPM 1996) their representatives point out that CBQs do not pay enough attention to general skills and skills aiming at the future, 'which are traditionally developed during studies.'

But even if there is consensus on the usefulness of assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, it does not mean there is agreement on what to assess. For instance, in the case of vocational qualifications, the views and wishes of different parties are usually based on needs for working life, but they may still differ and include debatable issues. For example, employers often seem to emphasize personal qualities (like initiative, motivation, diligence, adaptability) rather than skills and knowledge. These are of course difficult to assess, but - from the point of view of legitimacy - they also require even more consideration than task-specific skills and knowledge. Jonathan (1987, 94), referring to the British Youth Training Scheme in the 1980s, states that if training is task-specific, it can be judged simply on whether its objectives have been achieved efficiently and subject to the normal moral constraints. But 'when maximum adaptability is the watchword, as in the YTS, then learning objectives are rather defined in terms of changes sought in the dispositions of the trainee. [...] It is therefore not enough to ask whether such a scheme achieves its objectives: the objectives themselves need careful examination'.

Representatives of the employees in the report mentioned above (OPM 1996) express the importance of theory in addition to practical skills. Although the importance of theory should not be underestimated, theory and theoretical education is often also connected to the appreciation and status of a job or occupation. In the research by Haltia and Hämäläinen (1999), interviewed persons usually acknowledged the advantages of learning at work, but (theoretical) studies in educational institutions were also perceived as important, and not only because of what is learned in them. As one of the members of an examination board said: 'I am for studies in educational institutions, it is good for the occupation, for its esteem.' Fuller (1995), for example, describes concerns raised by a new competence-based approach to the training and assessment of air traffic controllers which was perceived as diminishing the role of theory. The issue was acknowledged to be contentious as it related to the professional status and image of ATCOs.

These examples imply that participation of all relevant parties and an open approach to developing standards and assessment methods is necessary to achieve legitimacy. In fact,

concerning Finnish CBQs, there seems to be a common understanding – at least in some respects among those directly taking part in the implementation of the system (members of examination boards and assessors) – on the role of CBQs: they are occupational qualifications and their requirements should be occupational. There may be somewhat differing opinions on what exactly these are, but so-called generic skills are not considered a prime issue. For instance, social skills may be required, but only to the extent that they are really needed in the occupation or branch in question. No one denies the usefulness of generic skills, but their development and assessment is perceived as primarily the task of formal education. (Haltia and Hämäläinen 1999) . So the 'vocationalism' of CBQs is probably the basis of their value. While no formal education is required to obtain the qualification, they cannot function – at least primarily – as a screening device the way educational qualifications do. Long formal education is often thought of as being in itself, regardless of the subjects studied, an indicator of personal qualities such as learning capability, ambitiousness, reliability, self-discipline and so on.

Concerning assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, the big question in Finland is, will those who have acquired their competence outside formal training really participate in the tests. If the predominant practice in future is that persons with little or no relevant work or other experience attend longish preparatory training in educational institutions before the tests, it is likely that we will eventually have a kind of a school-leaving examination rather than a way to demonstrate non-formal learning. The system can easily be made unattractive to many people by using 'school-like' assessment tasks and situations. Another big question is whether CBQs or individual modules are really needed in the labour market. There is little information on that yet, but the National Board of Education is going to start an evaluation project which will hopefully shed some light on this and other issues.

Competence-based qualifications are concerned only with competencies directly related to working life and only with part of the occupational structure. People of course learn all kinds of things all the time, and not all of these aspects are covered by the tests and qualifications discussed here. The Finnish Committee for Lifelong Learning (1997) states that CBQs are just the beginning of a more extensive system in which people can demonstrate their skills and knowledge. It is, however, still unclear what this system will be like.

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8. Accreditation of non formal learning in the Netherlands

Marian Nieskens and Ruud Klarus

8.1. Introduction

In recent years the accreditation of competencies acquired elsewhere or informally has been the subject of increasing interest. Schools, national bodies, government and other intermediary institutions attach great value to APL. CINOP developed a model which has since been tested and evaluated in various projects. The portfolio plays an important role in this model. A short overview of the development and the instruments and model used, will be presented in this article, which is based on the presentation and slides used during the Agora. For more information please have a look a the publication Accreditation of Prior Learning in the Netherlands (CINOP, 1997) or contact one of the persons mentioned at the bottom of this article.

8.2. Background

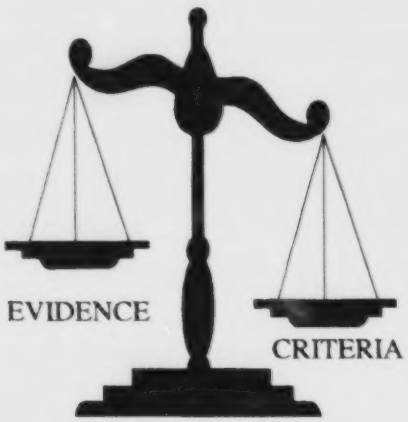
In 1994 the Committee for Accreditation of Acquired Competencies concluded that a system for APL in the Netherlands is desirable and feasible. In more recent years the National Action Programme on Lifelong Learning created an important context for the accreditation of non-formal learning. The developments in practice (pilots in APL) and developments in policies seem to result now in a basis for the broather implementation of accreditation of non-formal learning.

8.3. Accreditation of non-formal learning

Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) or, in Dutch: erkennen van competenties (EVC), is defined as the formal recognition of competencies gained through non-formal learning. With competencies we are focussing on the set of knowledge, skills, attitudes etc. an indivual has developed. The non- and/or informal learning refers to more or less formalised learning on the workplace, in voluntary jobs, at home, in study or work abroad etc. Formal recognition means that certificates based on the national qualification structure are given that result in exemptions for (parts of) the training course. It might be an "open door" to say people learn also outside the four walls of a college, but until now it was the only way to gain a formal qualification.

In most APL projects the national qualification structure is used to extract criteria from for APL, but also other standards can be used, for instance job profiles. The question is how the civil effects for the candidate that wants to be accredited can be garantied. In a simplified manner could be said that what is done is a comparison between criteria or a standard on the one hand and evidence for individual competencies on the other hand (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Scales



8.4. The candidates

Before we come back to this in detail, we like you to meet two of our APL-candidates. In general terms can be said that the following characteristics count for APL candidates: they are experienced in a certain job, don´t have diploma´s or formally recognised certificates in this profession, are very competent in their job and, for some reason, they want a formal qualification. The age of APL candidates varies, but in general can be said that they are adults. The two candidates that we also described in the Cedefop-project Identification and recognition of Non-Formal Learning (Jens Bjornavold, to be published Spring 1999) are Eric and Elsa.

Eric is 30 years old and he realises that if he wants to reach something in his profession he needs a diploma. Eric has been working in construction for 14 years now, in many different companies, mainly as a carpenter.The only time he studied during these 14 years, was in a correspondence course in psychology. Eric does not have any diploma in carpenting, the only diploma he has is one form senior secondary school. Eric started the 2-years part-time training course for carpenter in September 1996 at a Regional Training Centre (ROC), but unfortunately he dropped out after three months. He could not combine working, studying and taking care for his little baby. A few months later he read an article about a project for APL in construction, and he thought: "hé, this is about me!" He went back again to the same ROC and after three more months he was accredited for 12 out of 14 partial qualifications the training course consisted of. After two more months he finished the 2 partial qualifications that were left in a tailor made training course at the ROC.

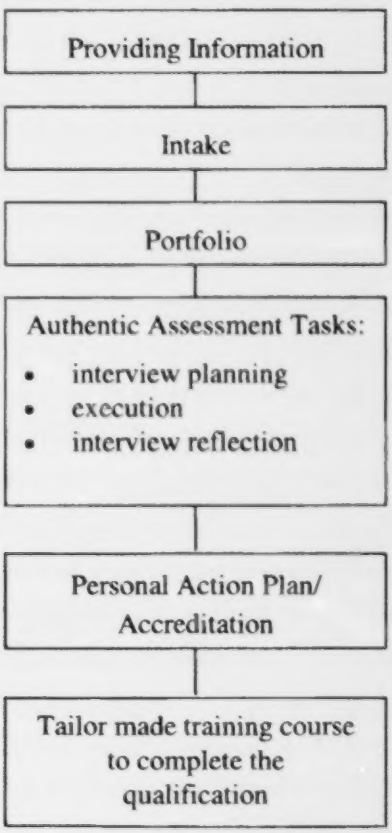
Elsa is 26 years old and is working since four years as an unpaid volunteer in a centre for childcare. Before she had children, Elsa used to work in retail trade. Elsa build valuable competencies both at home, with her three children, and in her voluntary job. She wants to be accredited to find a paid job and also because of a new legislation, that states that it is not allowed to employ unqualified people in childcare. On the basis of the procedure for accreditation of her non formal learning in childcare, Elsa was accredited for 6 out of 11 partial qualifications. She went back to school for one instand of two years and followed a tailor made training course that was realised for APL-candidates.

8.5. Methods for APL

The methods used in both cases are portfolio and authentic assessment tasks. In the first APL-pilots in the Netherlands the procedures consisted of a combination of both methods. In more recent pilots like in construction, authentic assessment tasks are only used when the information in the portfolio is not sufficient to take a decision. We found out that in many cases the authentic assessment tasks did not at different or new information to what was already found in the portfolio, but more research has to be done to give the solution. The situation differs also per sector: in care assessors and counsellors as well as developpers state that because the proces in these professions is of mayor importance, observation of performance is an essential part of the procedure.

In schedule the procedure for the candidates looks as follows:

Figure 2: stages in the APL procedure



In the case of Eric only for two partial qualifications the authentic assessment tasks were used. For Elsa all the partial qualifications were evaluated on the basis of portfolio and the authentic assessment tasks.

In both situations the procedure was done by a Regional Training Centre in co-operation with the National Vocational Body of the specific branche.

8.6. Portfolio

The Portfolio-method is aimed at the recognition and accurate description of competencies in a standardised manner and related to the criteria in the national qualification structure. The evidence that can be found in the portfolio can be divided in direct and indirect evidence. Direct proof consists of diploma´s and certificates, indirect proof are for example photografs of projects, testimonials from employers, results from tests, descriptions of workexperience etc.

However we have not pilotted yet in practice, it would be very useful and of importance for the quality of the portfolio to use the following criteria from O´Grady (1991). The more the evidence in the portfolio is meeting these criteria, the better the quality, validity and objectivity of the assessment results.

(a) authenticity: is the evidence really an accurate demonstration of the competencies of this candidate? Authenticity is conditional for all the other criteria . If the authenticity is doubtful this will lead to a lower acceptation of the portfolio in as a whole.

(b) actual: to what extent the evidence is representing the actual level of competency of the candidate? Evidence of a more resent date will meet this criterion easier then evidence of years ago. This also depends on the type of evidence: some competencies become obsolete sooner then others.

(c) relevance: to what extent does the evidence meet the most important elements of the specific competency/criteria? The more specific the evidence for the desired competency, the more relevant.

(d) quantity: how many months/years did the candidate do this job or how many training courses did he follow related to this competency?

(e) variety: did the candidate gain this competency in only one context or in several different situations? If he gained it in more different situations, there is a better chance for transfer of the competency.

To give an evaluation of the quality of the portfolio O´Grady suggests a weighing of the evidence related to these criteria. As mentioned, authenticity is a condition for all the other criteria. In a schedule this would look like this:

Figure 3: source O'Grady, 1991

	authenticity	actuality	relevance	quantity	variety
report of experience	good*	bad*			
Testimonials	Average*				
certificates					
products of experience					
observation					
interviews					

8.7. Authentic assessment tasks

In the authentic assessment tasks that are developed in the Dutch APL model a distinction is made between planning, execution and control or reflection on the assessment task. This distinction can be seen in every work process and the assessment is therefore congruent with the work process.

Figure 4: Congruency in work activities, assessment aspects and method.

Sequence in work activities	Assessment aspects	Assessment method
planning	planning skills and underpinning knowledge	interview on the basis of questionnaire
execution	performance/practical skills/attitude	observation of process and products on the basis of checklist
evaluating / control	effective skills/transfer competencies and underpinning knowledge	interview on the basis of questionnaire

Interview directed to planning (interview questionnaire)

Before the candidate performs the task he is interviewed by his assessor. The interview is directed towards the planning of the different actions. In other words the candidate is asked to point out the working methods he or she is going to use.

Execution of assessment task & observation checklist

The assessment of a specific competency is carried out in an actual or simulated practical situation or -if it is possible- at the company were the candidate works. The assessment task is done in a realistic context (worksample). A structured checklist helps to evaluate the performance. The candidate has to perform a task that represents the most central requirements of the qualification that has to be assessed.

Interview directed to transfer competencies (interview questionnaire)

After the candidate has finished the task he or she is interviewed again by two assessors. In this interview the candidate is asked to reflect on the just performed task and to answer questions about the transfer of his working methods and solutions to other situations within the same qualification domain.

8.8. Characteristics of the APL model

The APL-procedures in Childcare and construction are based on a general model of which the most important characteristics are competence based, congruence, criteria referenced, authentic and the integration of knowledge and activity.

8.9. Competence based

The assessment procedure is competence based. The candidates show their competence in an authentic work situation. Competence is defined in terms of an integrated set of cognitive and practical abilities and personal qualities that are essential to realise a particular outcomes in a particular situation as well as to transfer these abilities to another comparative context.

A candidate is said to be competent when he or she is able to perform in realistic worksituations to the quality standards defined by the social partners in that specific work domain. This means that the content of a specific assessment criteria is dependent on the way the standard is formulated. In the Netherlands the characteristics of the standard are discussed now. There is a tendency of formulating standards less conform educational rationality in favour of a more competence based, industry-led rationality.

8.10. Congruence

As described above, virtually all professional procedures are carried out in certain sequence: planning, executing, evaluating and adjusting. We also find a similar sequence in many of the practical assignments developed by the Lead Bodies for Vocational Education. This sequence

is also used as the starting point for the design of the assessment procedure. On the one hand, because the assessment aspects are in line with the phases of the execution of the assignment which facilitates assessment and scoring, while on the other hand, it offers the opportunity for congruence between the assessment procedure and educational strategy.

8.11. Criteria referenced

In the accreditation of prior learning, some verdict will have to be given on the extent to which someone complies with the requirements of a (partial) certificate. This means that a candidate's actions are compared with standardised and formalised qualification criteria. The candidate's scores are therefore not compared with the test scores within a group that has also worked on the same assignment.

In testing theory terminology we refer to this as criteria-referenced testing. The candidate's scores are compared with substantive qualification criteria. In tests in which the aspect in which the candidate is tested is compared with a (norm) group, we speak of norm-referenced testing.

An acceptable definition of criteria-referenced testing is that of Potham: "A criterion-referenced test is used to determine an individual's status as compared with a specifically described behavioural domain" (Hambleton, 1991, p. 4). A number of aspects of this definition deserve more detailed explanation.

Specific knowledge and certain practical skills are part of the "behavioural domains". In criteria-referenced testing, each behavioural domain to be tested must be accurately described. This is the only way in which test assignments can be constructed thereby allowing the test validity to be checked. Behavioural domains are best described when the users and the designers of test assignments agree on the content of an assignment. And finally: the word criteria does not refer to qualitative scores, but to substantively described behavioural domains.

Criteria-referenced tests are eminently suitable when it comes to evaluating whether an individual is able to demonstrate his or her specific skills. The danger of non-referenced testing in the assessment of professional qualifications is that it cannot be verified what a candidate is actually capable of: after all, the test cannot be related to specific skills. "If you have to undergo an operation, you want to know whether the surgeon is sufficiently skilled to perform the operation, and not whether he or she is better than 90% of all graduated surgeons. Knowing more about other graduates does not guarantee that the surgeon in question is able to perform the operation. It could even be that not one of the graduates is able to perform the operation successfully" (Schrock and Coscarelli 1989, p. 19).

8.12. Authentic

Authentic assessment is the most obvious form of competence assessment. Where else than in professional practice could the quality of the professional actions be assessed more validly, effectively and completely? Also is assumed that the predictions of future working behaviour can be assessed most validly on the basis of current working behaviour as long current and future working situations make similar requirements.

This does not detract from the fact that, for reasons of efficiency, there could be reasons not to use an authentic working situation, but a simulated working situation or to have authentic assignments carried out in a separate room (practical room). Usually the less authentic, simulated situations will be selected for reasons of safety (for instance in health care, process industry, aviation, shipping or inland shipping), or in view of the costs involved (process industry, information technology). In some cases the transition to authentic assessment will be delayed as a result of cost controls concerning investments in examination centres or in existing written or automated testing systems.

However a lot of value is given to authentic assessment tasks, some recent pilots have shown that authentic assessments do not always provide new information if compared to, for instance, the information extracted from portfolio assessment (Van den Dungen and Westerhuis, 1998).

So the opinion that assessment should be based authentic, might change in the near future. This can also be seen from the cases.

Finally it is in the nature of the competence if it can be better assessed by means of simulated or written forms of assessment, other than in professional practice. The type of competence (more practical or more cognitive) makes that it is easier to assess in a written test or simulated environment. In depends on what you want to find out in the assessment. Assessing the accuracy of the provision of factual information, for instance as in tourism, could be carried out in an authentic situation. However, it is probably better to assess purely cognitive competencies by presenting a candidate with a number of cases with multiple choice solutions or by evaluating the candidate directly (in writing or digitally).

Written tests are the most appropriate to assess declamatory knowledge, i.e. the ability to reproduce facts and rules. As soon as the issue is no longer the reproduction of facts and rules but their application, it will depend on the professional context whether either written tests or authentic, decentralised assessment options are the most appropriate. The testing of the knowledge of commodities in the retail trade can remain separate from the context in which they are used. However, the validity of the assessment procedure increases when the assessment focuses on the application of commodities knowledge in a sales talk.

8.13. Theory and practice integrated

If criterion-referenced assessment of professional competencies is to be authentic and congruent, we must depart from the classic distinction between theoretical testing and practical testing. When it comes to competencies, the issue is the utilisation of skills and knowledge. The assessment of competencies is not concerned with the question of whether a candidate can reproduce specific knowledge, but whether he or she is able to utilise the knowledge which makes it possible to achieve the objective set in professional practice. Competence means the proven capacity of an individual to use know-how, skills or knowledge. Knowlegde, in the meaning of declarative knowledge, and skills, in the meaning of being able to perform a specific task, can not be separated in the case of non-formal learning. An integrative approach is necessary to assess the competencies of the candidate.

Therefore, a distinction is made in the model between planning, executive and reflective skills. Planning and reflective skills presuppose that a candidate is sufficiently competent to apply relevant information and knowledge to work, in the responsibility for the execution and in the transfer to other situations.

9. Examination of the requirements for successful validation of vocational learning – The issue of legitimacy

Jens Bjørnåvold

I shall endeavour to outline the main features of the issue of legitimacy as a basis for discussion.

To begin with, the evaluation of non-formal skills is not simply a matter of how to evaluate individuals; it is much more a question of how to raise the social value, and especially the value in the labour market, of this particular type of learning which takes place outside the formal education system.

It is in a way a normative issue since we are really embarking upon a process of changing values.

That is why the task we have set ourselves is neither strictly technical nor strictly instrumental. It is a far broader task of transforming values which are deeply rooted in the culture of most countries.

Yesterday I used the example of the Mediterranean countries, where academic skills certificates are held in high esteem and where the re-evaluation of non-formal learning is a real challenge.

The issue of legitimacy associated with the process of evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning is of crucial importance in the debate we are engaged in today. Of course, the validity and reliability of methods are very important. But if the process on which we have embarked in order to include non-formal learning is regarded as an irrelevant or a disturbing exercise in itself (out of the question and even alarming), then the whole effort may be a waste of resources. I think that there were some indications yesterday, a few sociological factors, which show how important it is to raise this issue. However valid and reliable the methodology which we create, why should be devote time and resources to that enterprise if it has no real function in society? This is an important question.

We can compare the evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning with money, and the issue of bank notes. This is a very useful analogy. The value of money is not tied to the quality of the paper, nor to the quality of the printing on that paper. It is governed by the acceptance that the notes have value, real value, in society. In a way, it is therefore not enough for the notes to be legal tender. What matters is a far deeper legitimacy, the essential recognition of the fact that they represent real value in the society.

It is exactly the same thing in the case of the recognition of non-formal learning. This needs to be accepted as such by society. It is not enough to make it legal tender, to establish it as a legal standard.

We may pursue this monetary analogy somewhat further. I believe that the recognition of non-formal learning must, like money:

(a) firstly, provide simplified, standardised information for employers and other third parties,

(b) and secondly, as I have said, reflect real values, in this case the real skills innate in, or possessed by, the individuals in question.

Two problems arise from these two principles:

(a) The power of money resides in its capacity to simplify norms. Instead of exchanging oranges for apples, or motor cars for grain, we use money as a kind of standardised expression of value. And the problem is that the weakness of evaluating and recognising non-formal learning rests precisely in this need for simplification and standardisation. Given that non-formal learning is regarded as the result of complex and context-specific experience, then the attempt to standardise and simplify it may lead to the significant loss of information about skills if there is excessive simplification and standardisation. We therefore need to maintain a kind of balance. That is what we discussed yesterday. How can skills be captured and expressed appropriately, so that the real nature of those skills is not lost when they are recognised and expressed on paper?

(b) The second problem is to find some way of allowing a third party to have confidence in the information given, always supposing that it recognises and entirely validly represents genuine current skills, and that we have succeeded in completing this exercise. What sort of guarantees will there be? This is a crucial aspect.

The first problem is that of 'standardisation', how to provide 'proper information'. The second problem is that of 'guaranteeability' and 'confidence', which are of course closely linked to the issue of 'legitimacy'.

Thus the question is how to establish the institutional arrangements, and perhaps the policies, which will gradually generate this confidence in the documents which we issue to provide recognition of non-formal learning.

At this point we should perhaps try to consider some ways of generating that confidence. I believe that there are two main possibilities:

(a) The first possibility is a top-down approach. The State has always been the main actor in matters of certification. It has always been the State educational authorities that have drawn up certificates and other qualifications, and guaranteed their authenticity. I therefore believe that the central authorities, the educational authorities and the authorities responsible for the labour market, have an essential role to play in the non-formal arena.

The issue of institutional arrangements is very important. I believe that the key interested parties, employers and employees, must be consulted. It is vital to have relevant information. Moreover, the different interests concerned must be balanced in one way or another. Of course, when we look at the various empirical studies that we have carried out in different Member States of the European Union, we find a variety of approaches and attempts to involve the social partners in the discussion and the decision-making process alongside the national authorities. It is essential to discuss how to encourage this participation, how to balance the different interests concerned, both because this is truly a new field, and because the institutional arrangements that are adopted for the process of producing legitimacy are genuinely very important. This is the primary challenge that faces the traditional method of issuing certificates from the top, through a State agency – for non-formal learning in this case.

(b) The second possibility, which may perhaps not conflict with the first but rather complement it and be used in parallel, could be described as a bottom-up approach. Considerable work on this is being done by companies and the various sectors of the economy. In a large number of fields, and a large number of sectors, we are today seeing initiatives leading to sector agreements which lay down norms or standards of skills and competences in a particular sector or industry and seek to establish evaluation procedures based on these.

I believe that these initiatives by employers, sectors and industries are already significant and are certain to become more widespread. Their importance derives from the fact that the standards which they lay down are deeply rooted in company and industry practice, and this provides a form of guarantee to third parties that they reflect real skills and real needs.

In both cases – the top-down approach initiated by the national authorities, and the bottom-up – the question of salary levels arises in my view.

I shall not try to suggest how this question may be resolved, but I think that the acceptance of evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning is closely linked to the issue of salary levels, and that recognition of skills acquired informally has to produce a real return in the form of higher salary, and lead to a change in position within a company or open up new opportunities for recruitment.

These are the main issues that I wished to address with you.

To sum up, the issue of evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning is not a purely technical or instrumental matter of issuing a document. It is in fact a matter of changing values. Greater value, so to speak, has to be given to things learnt outside the traditional education system.

If we wish to succeed in this endeavour, the issue of institutional arrangements ('how to give third parties some guarantee that these documents reflect the true picture of actual skills') is very important. How can we set about creating the institutional arrangements for this process?

How do we reassure the different interested parties, and to what extent are they able to express their interests and to achieve a balance between their various interests?

That is my point of view, and I hope that it will provide a basis for discussion.

10. A few features of the situation in France - The views of CFDT on the measurement of informally acquired competences

José Danilo

The CFDT –*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* – takes the view that the French vocational training system has not reached its full potential to allow people to have their skills and qualifications evaluated, especially those acquired in a work situation. Experience of assessing informally acquired competences is very recent and still very limited. In France, an individual's skills are essentially judged according to the length of his training. Questions of certification play an important part, and the diploma is still the predominating model. This model may be reasonably appropriate for the measurement of competences acquired in initial training, but it is ill-suited to the validation of new skills acquired within the framework of an occupation, especially in less formal situations such as are found in association or union activities. To cite an example, this is true in particular of the social skills forged when someone takes trade union duties such as representing fellow workers. It is an unusual instance, but it shows the breadth of the issue we are discussing.

10.1. Some salient features of the French system

The system was set up in 1971 in a socio-economic context very different from today's. As the economic crisis developed, the goal of social advancement faded, to be replaced by the goal of vocational training. Needs generated by technological changes accentuated this trend.

Nevertheless, the system produced a series of interesting landmarks. Among these were the *congé individuel de formation* (individual training leave), the *capital temps formation* (training time capitalisation), the *allocation formation reclassement* (retraining allowance) and the validation of vocational prior learning. As regards the question with which we are concerned here, it was not until the 1980s that *certificats de qualification professionnelle* (vocational qualification certificates) made their appearance; these were administered within a branch of industry, in some cases a specific enterprise.

Most of these advances took place either as a result of negotiations between the social partners (industry and inter-industry agreements) or on the basis of legislation and government measures (laws, decrees and ministerial circulars). In many cases the initiative was taken by the social partners. They did the spadework and the government confirmed the initiatives by adopting statutory measures or regulations. All in all, a maze of legislation and measures was produced, through which only the specialists could pick their way. This is a potentially damaging aspect of the system. The 'white paper' presented in March 1999 by Nicole Pery,

Junior Minister for Vocational Training, to some extent took note of this complexity. It called on the social partners to conduct further negotiations for the year 2000, in which the question of the validation and recognition of prior learning should be a focal issue.

Vocational training has thus become a pressing social concern, especially because of its ability to breathe fresh life into the social dialogue. Although the outcome has been not insignificant so far, it is still inadequate. In quantitative terms, bearing in mind the initial intention of the Law, a very small proportion of low-skilled employees have enjoyed the benefits of the various schemes for their training and the evaluation of their skills. The full range of the needs of society and the strong demand for recognition of prior learning are far from satisfied.

(a) Overall, the system has mainly benefited large companies, whereas the substantial growth in employment has been in small and medium-sized enterprises.

(b) The 1971 Law has not achieved its quantitative objectives, since 40% of the population still have qualifications no higher than level V (CAP – BEP).

(c) The effects of training on employees' careers are relatively minor; only lengthy training courses make a genuine impact.

(d) Although more women work than men, they are less likely to receive training, for a variety of reasons due to the specific types of work that women do: forced part-time working: contractual, fixed-term employment; or work in sectors in which training is less developed, such as the service sector.

(e) Since 1971, measures have been introduced in an effort to improve the qualifications of the beneficiaries and to enable participants to embark on a vocational path towards qualifications

It is hard to discern any logical consistency among these measures, however. What every employer and every individual may legitimately look for is greater lucidity, an effort to investigate in depth the concept of a return on one's investment. The questions raised by the validation of prior learning, whether acquired through formal or informal channels, reflects this need for further investigation.

The research initiated by CEDEFOP on the identification, evaluation and recognition of informal learning of a kind that will bring a breath of fresh air into vocational training is to be welcomed. It reflects something that the CFDT has long been calling for. Developing and recognising the competence of individuals is a demand that has not as yet been widely taken up by employers.

This is why we found the statements made by the French employers' organisation (MEDEF) on competences both welcome and surprising. They are welcome, as they open up fresh prospects for the management of human resources. They are surprising because of their sudden inclusion in the employers' vocabulary.

A proper understanding of the French employers' change of heart will have to await information on the strategic lines along which they are directing their thinking. In the chapter

on its objectives, MEDEF talks about its concern to adapt the profile of individuals to the workplace context, being prepared for lifelong job mobility, improved productivity and even the relaunching of a social dialogue. In discussing the conditions, the employers place the emphasis on the role of enterprises in building up skills, the individual's responsibility and the restructuring of work organisation.

This internal French discussion on competences is triggering off two debates, one of a general scope on certification, the other on whether our system can translate into practice the procedures for access to competences and qualification. For such discussions, at least four points have to be covered:

(a) the need to understand the concept of competence and the concept of qualification;

(b) the need to define how competence is to be recognised;

(c) the need to analyse whether existing forms of certification can be used, whether they can be adapted or whether new forms should be devised;

(d) the need to measure the changes required in the arrangements negotiated between the social partners in order to promote access to qualifications and to optimise competences.

What is at stake is in fact the lifelong acquisition of qualifications. The role of the social partners is to create the conditions that will help to achieve this objective.

All this must be viewed in the light of the concerns expressed both by the French Government and the European Community. It must reconcile the demand for the recognition and validation of prior learning put forward by individuals, including those who are trying to enter the labour market – both the young people who have not obtained qualifications by the end of their initial education and training, and the long-term unemployed.

10.2. Opportunities to be grasped

Clearly we are confronted by a challenge, with the recognition of prior learning being a prerequisite for achieving mobility and social cohesion. It is very fortunate that this debate should be taking place in the European setting. The employment directives adopted in Luxembourg in November 1997 and the supporting national action plans in each country mark an important step forward. This series of measures is giving greater coherence to the measures being taken to combat youth unemployment and long-term unemployment. In the framework of these plans, clearly the social partners should closely monitor all the measures designed to harmonise the practice of identifying informal learning.

The prime source of opportunity lies in the wealth of experiments being conducted in individual countries in the Community. We need researchers to zero in on certain concepts. We need to define approaches. We need to analyse whether the current forms of certification can valorise competences or whether new methods are required. These highly complex discussions are undeniably of value in that we can go back to the drawing board and rethink

our vocational training analysis and practices. From our viewpoint, the questions will pertain more to the use made of training and the economic and social reasons that will promote the spread and popularisation of any given validation measure.

One of the essential issues in this debate is the risk of collective career management structures disappearing. It is easy to see the changes that would ensue from a management of human resources in which competence replaces qualification as the reference. This development would lead to the personalisation of contracts of employment. This is undesirable.

On the other hand, the aim of promoting the value of individuals may well, in a collective setting, generate a different impetus. The challenge is how to regulate but not necessarily reject this trend.

We also need to reflect on the consistency of different systems, the aim being transparency. The social partners have an important role to play in regulation. This responsibility is not sufficiently exercised by unions. It leaves they way open for employers, public-sector and private training agencies to make their own use of the certification systems.

Consultation with the social partners is vital, and should be conducted in a European context. For French trade unionism this is also a new order: it implies a different posture and the review of our union practices among union federations in Europe and in the European Trade Union Confederation.

Reforming our practices also means promoting the conditions and the environment that might encourage employees to apply for validation and broaden their qualifications. To do this:

(a) The unions must help to identify the needs.

(b) They must see the organisation of labour as a prerequisite for the production of competences.

(c) The consequences in terms of grading scales are direct, and these must be negotiated with the actual realities closely in mind.

(d) The effects of shorter working hours on the organisation of work and the identification of the qualifications needed for young people's jobs offer fertile ground for the emergence of these new practices.

A further opportunity has emerged as part of the employment chapter of the Law combat exclusion, passed by the French Parliament in July 1998. This is a major part of the Law and is in line with the Luxembourg directives on the question of unemployment among unskilled young people and the older long-term unemployed. The social partners are called upon to perform their role side by side with the Government and local authorities.

One innovation is the extension of the 'qualification contract' to adults, whereas previously it was solely for the under-25s. This extension is being launched on an experimental basis up to 31 December 2000 and should lead to negotiations between the social partners. CFDT was an originator of this proposal, which was taken up in the Law. During the preparation of the

decrees, we strongly urged that this measure should as a priority benefit the long-term unemployed without a recognised qualification. At present, the scheme is in its infancy. CFDT hopes that there will be an information campaign to promote the 'adult qualification contract'. The value of this operation is that it is in line with the measurement of competences acquired informally through a range of different work activities. The long-term unemployed have plans more often than they are are given credit for. They have lived through difficult situations, but they also have a wealth of experience and a whole store of expertise. This is why CFDT would not like to see too much emphasis being placed on the 'training' aspect of the contract. It would prefer if possible for the qualification to be acquired at work, and for alternance training methods to be adapted to achieve this.

What is needed is to develop procedures that can be used both for the validation of expertise and informal learning and for motivating the people in question to acquire a recognised, certified qualification. The new training methods that should be introduced into the workplace should also integrate the role of the social partners. Union bodies will have an important role to perform.

11. Social partners' round-table discussion: the validation of prior learning: what can we build together?

Juan Maria Menéndez-Valdés ([38]), *Hjørdis Dalsgaard* ([39]), *Nikolaus Bley* ([40])

11.1. Juan María Menéndez-Valdés

11.1.1. Why validate and at what level?

There is no doubt that we are living in a complex society in which the process of learning is not confined to conventional school education. The information society requires that we go on learning throughout our life using a variety of different means: educational establishments, experience, self-study, domestic work, community work, etc. However, traditional systems only recognise and certify learning acquired through formal, academic channels.

In one of the articles used for this Agora Jens Bjørnåvold ([41]) refers to the motivation for creating mechanisms for identifying and validating non-formally acquired learning: He places these mechanisms at three levels:

(a) The social environment: At this level such mechanisms could simplify the transfer of knowledge and skills between different environments such as school, work, etc. and make for a better allocation of human resources. This would undoubtedly operate to the benefit of both individuals and employers.

([38]) Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations. Available from Internet http://www.sispain.org/spanish/economy/ceoe.html [in spanish]

([39]) Undervisningsministeriet [Danish Ministry of Education]. Available on Internet: http://eng.uvm.dk [cited on 25.2.2002].
Område for folkeoplysning og voksenuddannelser (VUF) [Department of popular education and adult training]. Available on Internet: Open education – http://www.uvm.dk/eng/publications/factsheets/engfol.htm, Popular education – http://www.uvm.dk/eng/publications/factsheets/ fact5.htm, Vidar – http://www.vidar.dk/ [in Danish] [cited on 25.2.2002]

([40]) Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) [German Union Confederation] http://www.dgb.of Bildungswerk Nordrhein-Westfalen e.v. [DGB Training Department in North Rhine-Westphalia]. Available on Internet: http://www.dgb-bildungswerk-nrw.de [in German] [cited on 25.2.2002].

([41]) Bjørnåvold, Jens. Assessment of non-formal learning: the quality and limitation of methodologies. *European Journal Vocational Training*, September-December 1997, No 12, p. 52-67. Available from Internet: http://www2.trainingvillage.gr/download/journal/bull-12/12 -97-en.pdf [cited 30.5.2002]

(b) The working environment: Here they would enable an employer to gain a more thorough knowledge of his human resources and thus enhance the potential for human resource management.

(c) At individual level: Validation of prior learning can both facilitate entry to or the continuing of formal education and improving opportunities for employment.

The undeniable interest of such mechanisms and their potential usefulness has triggered a wide-ranging debate on the subject in many countries. This raises the question of who should create the mechanisms, the public authorities or firms themselves, whether one should wait for the emergence on the market of specialised bodies to undertake the task, or whether it is up to individuals to take the initiative.

To answer these questions it may be useful to refer back to Bjørnåvold's three levels and apply them to the subject of qualification according to the degree of generalisation the concept is accorded:

In a social environment a qualification is understood more generically as a standard occupational or professional profile associated with a nationally attested title or qualification.

It is clear that in the society in which we live the public authorities enjoy more or less of a monopoly when it comes to laying down the rules for obtaining such qualifications, regardless of whether the institutions awarding them are in the public or private sector.

Logically, therefore, it should also be the public authorities who decide to allow innovations affecting these rules in order to meet the social objectives mentioned. To achieve a better allocation of human resources we need standards that are more transparent so that we can classify them more clearly. In recent years the majority of national vocational education and training systems have used definitions based on knowledge and skills required in order to perform certain occupational tasks. It is occupational competence that is recognised and certified, not specific training. If we accept that such competence may be gained in different ways, some of them non-formal, the next step is to allow them to be recognised and certified, though always in relation to a national system of benchmarks. The role of the public authorities here is to link this generic concept of qualification to a standard occupational profile. Validation and certification of isolated skills is meaningless at this level unless it takes place within a modular system, signifying steps along the road to a standard qualification.

Spain's current national vocational training programme has adopted this approach. There are in Spain three vocational training sub-systems, namely initial vocational training which comes under the education system, occupational training for the unemployed, which comes under the Ministry of Labour, and continuing training for those in employment, which is managed by a foundation run jointly by employers' and trade union organisations with government involvement.

The multiplicity of certificates in existence makes it difficult for employers to see at a glance what skills an individual actually possesses. As in countries such as France, the qualifications

that carry more weight are still those awarded under the education system - a fact that stands in the way of an appropriate allocation and use of other available human resources.

Recently the Spanish government set up the Instituto de las Cualificaciones or Qualifications Institute - a body responsible for evolving a national system of qualifications to serve as a benchmark not just for the three sub-systems, but also for knowledge and skills acquired by non-formal means. There are plans to introduce new cross-points for transfer between one sub-system and another and modular systems to enable knowledge and skills acquired by whatever method to be accumulated, culminating in a recognised formal standard qualification.

Nonetheless, in the case of certain general technical skills common to a variety of occupations, such as languages or arithmetical or computer skills, there may be a point in devising some system of individual accreditation. However, we should ask ourselves in such cases whether there is any need for involvement on the part of the public authorities, which in any case should be limited to guaranteeing the existence of means of recognition generally accepted by individuals and employers.

On the other hand, there would be no point in creating official systems of accreditation for other general skills of a cognitive nature, such as the ability to plan, take decisions, solve problems and the like, or social skills such as the ability to communicate or work in a team. These abilities are not usually regulated and as a result tend to be acquired by non-formal methods. They are, however, undeniably relevant and it is vitally important that they be included in training programmes. However, any type of official certification for them would carry little credibility. There may be certificates of qualification for teachers or business people which need to take account of their ability to communicate, but it would be absurd to issue 'good communicator' certificates.

In a working environment a qualification is understood as the profile of abilities needed for a given job or a specific occupational group within an organisation. Here the sets of skills demanded are far more specific and in many cases are not taken into account in national systems, or else are a mix of several national qualifications (lawyer-economist, medical doctor with commercial experience, electronic/mechanical engineer, etc.).

Is public-authority intervention appropriate at this level? In our view it would not be useful and could even impede the development of more go-ahead firms that stand out from the crowd.

This does not mean, however, that nothing should be done. But the mechanisms for recognition and validation of skills, especially when non-formally acquired, should be situated at the level of employers (or sector of activity), with two paths:

(a) Firstly via systems for human resource management. A growing number of firms are introducing systems of management by competence. The skills needed for the various jobs are defined within a firm and systematic assessments carried out to ascertain which

individuals possess them. A comparison of the two profiles - theoretical and actual - provide the basis for a more effective formulation of human resource policy in its different aspects - recruitment, training, career planning, job mobility, remuneration and so on. In this case specific assessments of general skills acquired by non-formal means, such as the ability to work in a team, communicate, etc., can and should be carried out. To do so employers have at their disposal a whole range of instruments devised by organisational psychologists, such as role-playing, test situations, interviews and assessments centres which they can use as and when appropriate without the need for prior official intervention.

(b) Secondly and linked to the first possibility, is collective negotiation between employers and employee representatives in order to conclude the relevant agreements. These may lay down in terms reflecting the realities of the firms concerned, the impact of these processes in terms of job classification, promotion, training, etc.

At individual level qualification denotes the whole fund of knowledge and skills a person possesses. This fund, which may reflect in his curriculum vitae, will comprise:

(a) Knowledge and skills certified in relation to national standards. Only in accordance with this framework, will the systems for identifying and recognising skills non-formally acquired fulfil their stated objectives of enabling a person to take part in further courses of study and improving his job prospects.

(b) Knowledge and skills demonstrated in other ways: certificates of limited value, work placement reports, documentary evidence or samples of work carried out, etc.

(c) Knowledge and skills not susceptible of accreditation, which will be assessed where appropriate by an employer in the course of selection and recruitment.

11.1.2. Possibilities for joint action

On the basis of what has been said we believe that there is scope for joint action at European level that should be exploited. When we talk of a better allocation of human resources and a greater employment market transparency we must not forget that we are talking of what calls itself the Single Market and counts among its liberties the free movement of labour.

While we have to accept that language barriers will always preclude the existence of a single labour market, the progress being made with regard to mobility will work to the benefit of European citizens generally.

From this point of view we consider that mechanisms for validating prior learning at European level should use the channels of the national systems of qualifications in which these mechanisms are incorporated. We can then advance on two fronts:

Firstly we can improve the transparency of certificates of qualification issued under national systems, including those which take account of prior learning. In view of failures to

standardise qualifications in the past the most likely way would seem to be a generalised practice of attaching to certificates some form of annex with a common format that makes them more comprehensible to employers in other contrast. One might, for example, use the annex to university certificates of qualification proposed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

A second approach might be to make it easier for a person to continue studying in a country other than his own. A system similar to the Europass might be used in this connection. Specific consideration should be given to systems for validating prior learning that permit the individual concerned to proceed to formal education courses in one country with the possibility of transferring to another Member State.

Another area for action in line with the proposals of the European Commission is the possibility of extending accreditation of certain types of skills at European level. Such proposals are important from the point of view of encouraging labour mobility, even though they are limited to a few specific skills (computer-related skills, languages, arithmetical skills). On the other hand, the current proposals for interactive testing using the Internet do not offer even minimum guarantees as to the identity and actual knowledge of the person being examined, and hence lack the necessary credibility.

Nonetheless a strengthening of links between existing national systems is an additional requirement for progressing towards a greater mobility of human resources in a European market.

11.2. Hjørdis Dalsgaard

The subject of this round-table discussion is: 'What can we build together?'. It is a very difficult question, especially as we do not know how to approach it. I am from a ministry of education and of course I shall adopt the viewpoint of a ministry of education. What do we think in particular of the role of education in general, and why do we think that non-formal qualifications are important?

In Denmark we feel that there are four key terms for our education system:

(a) first of all, the knowledge society, since that is the society towards which we are heading, although we do not know very well what the knowledge society is nor what it will demand of us. We know simply that it is going to change quite a lot of things.

(b) welfare, because we think that qualifications are closely linked to how well we succeed in developing our welfare society;

(c) values, because education in itself means strengthening our society's basic values, and because the choice of an education policy is based on fundamental values;

(d) vision, because our vision of adult education and training should correspond to the vision being created of Denmark and the future of the Danes.

The education system we would like to see in Denmark, and in particular the system of adult education and training, is a system centred on the demands of a knowledge society, a system offering training to all types of adults, whatever their background. This implies that very special attention should be devoted to people of low scholastic attainment, because these are the people least likely to use the adult training system.

And we also hope for a system in which the watchwords are the comprehensiveness, coherence, transparency and quality of its vision. We would like to have a system characterised by the fact that people believe in lifelong training. This term 'lifelong training' in particular encourages us in Denmark to allow individuals, adults, to shoulder most of the responsibility for their own education.

If you hope to encourage people to believe in lifelong training and to go on training throughout their lives, they must feel they are capable of it. They have to learn to learn, and this may perhaps be something already acquired at school. It is of course also the responsibility of the State, and therefore of the education ministries, to make it as easy as possible to understand the system. It is their responsibility to help individuals find their own way through the system and to see the attraction of pursuing their training throughout their lives.

It might be thought that in Denmark this is already happening, since Denmark is the country with the highest number of people in the world in adult training in proportion to the total population.

Last year one Dane out of two was involved in one way or another in a training measure. And recent research has shown that 9 out of 10 adults believe in 'lifelong training'. This is a fairly good sign for us, then. But even so we do not think that the system is working well enough, to the point of being able to attain all we want to achieve through education.

We have also spoken of the objectives. Why are we suddenly talking about non-formal qualifications? In Denmark we have started to work with non-formal qualifications, whereas only 10 years ago this was something we did not envisage. It is no doubt due to the fact that we are now confronted with another type of situation. Today we have practically no more unemployment – over the years to come we shall have very small cohorts of young people – and so we need to integrate every single adult worker into the labour market. We are even trying to encourage people to defer the time of their retirement. Ten years ago we were trying to pressurise people out of the labour market. Today we want them to remain there, we want them to go on putting their skills to work as long as possible.

I shall give two examples of how we have started to integrate non-formal qualifications:

(a) First example: in Denmark, we place education into two categories: formal education and non-formal education. Non-formal education is also part of the education that comes under the Ministry of Education (even though this is not perhaps very much in line with the definition given yesterday by Jens Bjørnåvold). We have this thing that is specific to

Scandinavia that we call *folkeoplysning*. A literal translation would be *people enlightenment*. But that sounds very old-hat, and we prefer to use the Danish term, *folkeoplysning*. It is a word we have inherited from a wise old man from the 19th century, Pastor Grundtvig – indeed, his name has just been given to EU educational programmes ([42]). He thought it very important for every adult to be able to participate in the everyday life of society, and therefore that it was essential to learn basic values: democracy and the quality of human beings. We still have this *folkeoplysning*. For the kind of training courses in which we talk about open-mindedness and personal development there is no examination, no certificate, no monitoring of any kind whatsoever. You simply embark on the training, you pay part of the training cost and the State pays the rest, and you stay in training for a few weeks or a few months. You finish it, and that's all. That is non-formal education. Of course we also consider that things learned elsewhere in social life are non-formal education. But *folkeoplysning* could be called institutionalised non-formal training. I think it is altogether specific to the Danish education system.

And then we have formal education – general on the one hand, vocational on the other. I shall be talking only about the latter. In the field of adult vocational training, we have started to set up the recognition of non-formal qualifications. The system was created in 1993 and it operates in parallel with the training of young people. Only adults can enter this system, since the minimum age is 25. They must take training courses or enter apprenticeship programmes on the same terms as young people, but they may be exempted from part of the programme if they have particular educational or vocational attainments. They still have to take an examination. And the decision concerning the amount of the programme from which they are exempted is reached on an individual basis and is determined by the branch committee. It is that committee that is responsible for individual programmes.

This works roughly in the same way as described yesterday when talking about the Dutch case in which Éric, who had lengthy experience in carpentry work, was able to sit the examinations for a carpentry diploma in the space of one year in all.

(b) Second example: we have another field, which we call open education. It is also part of the vocational training system, where an adult may be exempted from some of the training. This may be the case of people working in child care units who, after a certain number of years' work, may sit for the vocational certificate and, here again, may be exempted from part of the formal training.

These are the two examples of what we have introduced and that take account of non-formal education.

([42]) On 1 January 2000, and for seven years (2000-2006), the second phase of Socrates, the European education programme, came into force. This creates a link with the first phase of the programme, which had been in force up to then and had lasted five years (1995-1999). One of the eight Socrates actions, action 3, is the GRUNDTVIG action – *Adult education and alternative learning pathways* http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/adult/home.html.Cf. also http://www.ac-nantes.fr/peda/ress/socr/grundtvi.htm [in French]

We have, admittedly, a third example too, but we have not yet introduced it or put it into practice ([43]).

In 1997 the Ministry of Education launched a new programme for adults. We call it 'further education for adults'. The idea is that the system is aimed at all adults, whatever their previous qualifications. The system is intended to offer all adults the opportunity to acquire a qualification through courses or training at a clearly defined level of competence. The first aim is to raise the standard of job-related competence of all adults and, to a lesser degree, to develop their ability to educate themselves. We should like to introduce four certificates or qualifications. The idea is that, in order to enter the scheme, adults have to have at least two years' work experience.

The four certificates are:

(a) the first level is called basic education for adults and corresponds to a period of 18 months;

(b) the second level, which adults do not of course necessarily have to take, but which may be achieved as a result of a few extra years on the labour market, is called post-secondary adult education and corresponds to a period of one year;

(c) next, if the adult wishes to continue, he or she may spend an extra year in education and obtain a diploma;

(d) finally, if the adult wants to go on to a master's, he or she may continue with an additional 18 months' course.

It takes six years, therefore, for an adult to obtain a master's degree.

Of course all these courses may be combined in different ways, taking into account the elements of the Danish education system. The idea is to combine work experience – and to obtain credits for this – and perhaps elements from the *folkeoplysning*, which unfortunately does not give rise to formal competences but may confer a few points. In this way each individual can map a route that will lead to a diploma. We consider that this demand is important and we think it is entirely suited to the chaos situation that has been discussed, because it is very flexible, and it seems that the system can be so arranged as to meet the demand and needs of every single adult.

([43]) Since Agora V was held, Law 488 of 31 May 2000 on basic vocational training and in-depth adult vocational training has been passed by the Danish Parliament and the main implementing decrees have been adopted. Available on Internet: http://www.retsinfo.dk/index/UND/AT000399.htm [in Danish] [cited on 25.2.2002].

Question: Will the training be taken in parallel with work?

Niels J. Nordbøge ([44]): The 'further education for adults' system is intended to be a part-time training system, which means that a working activity can be combined with evening, weekend or summer holiday courses, etc.

Hjørdis Dalsgaard: But I would like to stress the fact that nothing has yet been decided. For the time being, it is a proposal by the Ministry of Education. We have started to discuss it with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Finance. But nothing has yet been decided, especially at the financial level.

Barbara Jones: Are the adult trainees those who bear the cost of the training?

Hjørdis Dalsgaard: This is a question we were discussing with the Ministry of Finance. In general we devote a good deal of money to adult education in Denmark. The Ministry of Finance thinks we spend too much. But we do not agree. However, I think we would like employees to pay a share of this training and they might well do so if they are persuaded of the value to them of such training.

11.3. Nikolaus Bley

I have been very struck by what is being done in Denmark. If I compare this with what is being done in Germany about the issues being debated here, I have to admit that we are one of the countries that have accumulated the least experience in the field, and we are shown to be the least flexible in the face of the new demands as described by Riel Miller.

From what we have heard about the demands of the future – the knowledge society, welfare state, value policy – I would very much like to add to it. I am totally in agreement. In Germany there is a very important debate as to the substance of our theme: 'the future of work' *(die Zukunft der Arbeit)*. In other words, it will not be just a question of a knowledge society, but, in this society, we also have to work. What form of work? It is a question we must tackle urgently. We must try to arrive at a reply to this question, so that we can adapt both our primary (basic) education system and our secondary (non-formal) system.

There are different committees at different levels of the State that are concerned with this question of work in the future. I do not need to demonstrate further that this is a matter of importance for us: dramatic technological developments, for example, are taking place. Anyone taking a computer course today knows that, in at most a year, the newly acquired qualifications will be out of date. It is true of many other domains as well, especially regarding changes in the organisation of work. I believe it is a very important issue, and I am also very

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([44]) Undervisningsministeriet, Område for folkeoplysning og voksenuddannelser (VUF), [*Ministry of Education, Department of Popular Education and Adult Training*].

concerned about the question of knowing what the social partners are doing jointly. Can they have common interests? This has already emerged several times during the course of the Agora. I believe that the central concept with which we are faced as regards both formal and informal training is the question of interests.

I shall start with the employers. Of course they have an interest in information on the work forces at their disposal, or those they would like to procure on the labour market. They also have a great interest in identifying the *knowledge potential (Wissenspotential)*, which is absolutely not evident in the process of work as it is organised today.

I shall cite one small example of this: one of the reasons why 'autonomous group work' *(Gruppenarbeit)* was introduced into the car industry is the benefit it was hoped could be derived from the informal knowledge emerging in the course of production. A worker does not just switch a machine on and off. He knows, through everyday experience, (given that machinery does malfunction) how to repair machinery in simpler cases, for instance he may know that all that is needed is to bang on the first cap on the top left for the machine to start up again.

There is a whole set of little things of this kind that are in a way kept concealed (secret), and on which management would like to be able to draw. There, are, then several possibilities. What kind? Quality circles, etc., a set of structures and organisations that has been introduced into all types of industry, that will help to find out about these 'little tricks' that it would be very helpful to know. In the same way, it would be of interest in an assessment centre, when one is looking to recruit someone, to invite him to a meal and see how he goes about eating a fish that is difficult to handle. Because at some time or other, in a managerial role, he will come up against this type of situation.

But I would say that although there is great value in the ways in which this knowledge is used, there is far less value in certifying it because, in practice, this will automatically be translated into the idea of 'I want to earn more'. In any case, from the union viewpoint, this means very soon saying 'I want more money'.

For example, when autonomous group work is introduced and when people are better qualified in doing different types of work, this means 'my qualifications are better, my labour is worth more, and I can therefore also sell it at higher cost to the extent possible'.

Employees' interests are exactly the reverse of their employers'. Employees strengthen their position on the market, the amount of information they hold. They can impose their own value better. They have something more in their possession, something that goes beyond their simple and immediate person; they have information that enables them to demonstrate their skills clearly and that gives them the means of winning pay rises.

With this in mind, I feel it is the duty of the unions and the State to uphold these claims. Unless a system is introduced that will guarantee such informally acquired learning in these particular fields, it may lead to mass deskilling.

There is in fact a massive process of technical obsolescence, which means that what was learned 10 or 15 years ago is very fast becoming useless. And if, for one reason or another, I have to leave the job I am now doing, I must be able to find something equivalent to what I have been doing up to then. This means that the unions and the State have a protective function. We must act to ensure that, through certification, the free play of market forces does not have such a violently negative effect on individual workers.

The certification of informal and non-formal learning, then, is a social policy measure. It comes under social policy and is its main reason. It must be clearly stated. It is a public measure aimed at guaranteeing the position of employees in the face of radical market change. It is for this reason that we are doing it, and it is for this reason that, as a union, we see it as right and proper.

And, besides that, I think there is yet another function of certification and the process through which it is obtained. It is that the individual finds in this process an incentive for learning. It is a stimulus. Looking ahead to the global changes being faced by society, this is of crucial significance. It is not the role of the State and employers alone, but also and very specially the role of the union confederations.

If, as Niels Jørgen Nordbøge said here at this Agora, training is a national sport in Denmark, then I can say that, in Germany, we unfortunately prefer to watch this sport on the television: in other words passively, as a spectator. But training is a vital prerequisite if we are to be able to solve our problems in the future.

There may also be something else. How can this be organised at European level among individual countries? It is only logical that this question should be asked here at Cedefop. I think it is important to take a very pragmatic approach. For example, as regards the implications of educational theory, must we absolutely seek to implement a fundamental educational concept and look for where a magnetic card can be obtained? I believe that is going too far. We really need to be far more pragmatic and, in particular, to opt for developments that have links with other countries.

I imagine that if we adopt the idea of introducing a magnetic card – a *'chip card'* – in Germany, this would be accepted neither by individual workers nor by employers and, as already pointed out, acceptance is of prime importance. One needs to build on a country's tradition.

For example in France, in any case from what one reads, and as a result I was surprised by what I have heard here, social status depends very directly on the position reached in the traditional education system. In Germany, things are somewhat different. But one can imagine the consequences for a social system as a whole of a change affecting this basic principle. I am obviously not referring to the interests of the people who have some power in the system and who of course always have an interest in the system changing as little as possible: this is only an epiphenomenon.

What is important, and it has been said by other people here, is to arrange for the initial education system, the system in which we take the baccalaureate, the school, to be capable of preparing people for a situation in which they will face the need to train, and of giving them the ability to benefit from continuing training. This means that the ability to learn must be instilled at a very early age.

There is a *DGB Bundesvorstand* project on the way we shall have to manage to change things in vocational training. For example, we might take modules of standard content as regards knowledge, but differing in approach depending on the individual through his life. For instance, one might start with a basic qualification and then add to it by topping it up with a series of skills and knowledge, accumulated in modules, so that each person can construct his own curriculum vitae as regards his working life and continuing training in a very individual manner. This of course presupposes many things that do not yet exist. For example, opportunities to take training leave. If one is in a job and would like now, for instance, to study a 'computer' module, one would have to be away from work for a week or two. There are a number of measures allowing this, but they are not altogether appropriate.

This is quite new and only a proposal, but it is an attempt to modify the system a little. I have the full text of the proposal at your disposal.

As I said when I began, the German system is very rigid. It is a very large country, in which the Länder are responsible for training policy and, as Burkart Sellin has already said, it is difficult to introduce and disseminate new ideas in Germany – all the more so when the issue is complex. On the union side, we are obviously trying to do something along these lines. But it is very hard to rely on the support of the people in training and of the State and moreover – and this is really sad – employers are very strongly opposed. The atmosphere in general is not propitious for continuing training.

Because of the particular immediate financial interests of individual enterprises and very often of their associations, the employers argue against continuing training and its potential.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, and I would like to say a brief word on this, training leave does exist – i.e. the opportunity to take one week's leave a year to train.

About 0.1% of the population takes advantage of such leave, and there are over a thousand cases before the court at federal level, before the industrial tribunal *(Arbeitsgericht)* in Kassel. The atmosphere in which this challenge for the future is being tackled is not altogether encouraging. And it is also why there is no instance – or at least personally I know of none – except for competence-based examinations *(Begabtenprüfung)*, where informal learning has a role to play. Obviously one can study or take examinations in Germany (the baccalaureate, for example) on the basis of competences, but, apart from this, the bridges are very clearly underused.

12. Summary of discussions

As this Agora draws to a close, the importance of the challenges of the identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning is, we feel, clearly perceived by all those involved in initial and continuing vocational training, in every country of Europe. There are still many points of disagreement, but these are discussion points rather than sharp divergences. And although the initial common ground might at first seem narrow, Agora discussions have shown that this could rapidly be broadened by joint work on concepts, objectives and methodologies and instruments.

The purpose of this summary of the Agora V discussions is to bring out as clearly as possible the points of agreement on which a consensus can be achieved among the social partners, policy-makers and grassroots practitioners (trainers in initial and continuing training, those responsible for the process of evaluation, the direct beneficiaries of evaluation), as well as the points still under discussion or pending.

To keep pace with the rate of progress of the Agora's work, this summary is presented session by session, in each case describing the main issues raised in the introductory papers given by individual speakers as well as the points made in the general discussion that followed.

12.1. A review of the accreditation of prior learning

12.1.1. Preliminary papers

In his opening address, Jens Bjørnåvold (Cedefop) first attempted to classify the EU countries according to their concept of non-formal learning. He stressed four points:

(a) the definition of the concept of non-formal learning;

(b) the importance of the societal setting;

(c) the new departure in our thinking implied by recognition of a system based on skills rather than education;

(d) the importance of the link – or rather the bridge - between initial training and continuing training.

First of all, why non-formal learning rather than informal learning?

'Informal' implies 'accidental' training or learning, unplanned learning that ensues from other activities. This is obviously an important part of what is at issue in Agora V. But, apart from these unforeseen, accidental learning, there also exists planned training outside the educational system, in the workplace or elsewhere, and this is steadily increasing in Europe. In

Agora V, both these factors are under discussion. And when we speak of non-formal training, we refer to the training that takes place outside the formal educational system.

The second point is linked to the technical and methodological aspects of the assessment and recognition of what has been acquired by non-formal learning. Here we come to the central issue of reliability and validity. The quest for absolute reliability, with everyone being treated in the same way, might well result in a jumbled set of assessments. The quest for absolute validity would lead to assessments that go into the most detailed fields of competence and to a total fragmentation of the concept of competence. The question, then, is how to determine the degrees of reliability and validity best suited to each type of society's methods of operation and requirements. Starting with an analysis of the methodologies in a narrow sense, we ended by realising that we should not become bogged down in the debate on methods and instruments, but should launch a new debate on the broader political and social context, on the societal context in which those methodologies have their place.

The third point relates to the change of direction that has been initiated as a result of taking non-formal learning into account in the way we think about what is achieved. Once the reference in terms of learning and knowledge is no longer what has been taught, the course content (the *input*), but the result, in other words competence and performance, this alters the whole way in which we think about the formal system of training, challenging our concept of initial and continuing vocational training in particular.

This brings us to the fourth point: the need to build bridges between the different systems of training in each country.

The common factor in the experience of individual European countries is their effort to link the different systems of training: initial and continuing training, formal and non-formal training, learning in an educational establishment and apprenticeship in the workplace. The attempts to relate one to another are very important. If they were not to be made, we would risk the dispersal and lack of coordination of the range of training systems in society – something that we can unfortunately already to some extent perceive today – resulting in the under-exploitation of society's existing knowledge and skills base.

Riel Miller (OECD), the author of a book entitled '*Measuring what people know*' (OECD, 1992), preferred in his introductory talk to put the question of 'why should we measure human capital?'. In his view, we are moving towards a system in which the provision of training will no longer be the determining factor.

We are accustomed to reason in terms of physical production, but it is increasingly evident that we are now moving beyond the realm of the industrial society. This necessarily has consequences for the method of training that should be set up to prepare for the learning society 25 to 30 years ahead, although we do not really know what it will be like. Admittedly, people learn everywhere and all the time, creating a need to reduce waste through validation. There is no doubt that a system of assessment and certification of achievement, whatever it may be, is well suited to a system based on a learning economy.

Eric Fries Guggenheim (Cedefop) saw the validation of prior learning as a means of both reducing the social divide and promoting lifelong education and training. The recognition of informally acquired knowledge by the same diplomas or certificates as those obtained through the formal training channel places individuals in a good position to put their working potential to profitable use. It gives them stronger arguments and greater mobility. Furthermore, in that it helps to raise the self-esteem of the persons concerned and in that such recognition is often combined with a minimum additional training effort (cf. the validation of vocational learning – *validation des acquis professionnels (*VAP) in France, the Dutch system of recognising prior learning, the Danish system of adult vocational training, etc.), it can be an excellent Trojan horse for adult training. By cutting the training time taken to acquire a recognised qualification, it improves the likely success of a training course taken in parallel to a vocational activity and is an incentive for the individual.

12.1.2. Round-table discussion

Three speakers took part in the round-table discussion for vocational training practitioners and the social partners that followed the three introductory papers: Eugenio Rosa of the Portuguese General Trade Union Confederation, Mike Coles from the UK Qualification and Curriculum Authority, and Donal Kerr from the Irish Training and Employment Authority (FÁS).

Eugenio Rosa (CGTP) stressed the important distinction between the school diploma and the certificate of recognition of prior learning to which Jens Bjørnåvold alluded in his introduction. The school diploma certifies attendance of a course and the assimilation of knowledge linked with that course, whereas certification of skills acquired through work experience is judged in relation to the expressed needs of the occupation or the sector in question. According to Eugenio Rosa, these two are complementary.

He pointed out the difficulties of trying to acquire all the skills needed in working in an occupation all at one time, and thought that there should be a move towards a gradual assessment and certification of skills. Certification should not go beyond what each worker needs in order to perform his job.

He also felt that benchmarks for certification and assessment should be formulated on a tripartite basis. He pointed to the experience of the tripartite technical boards set up in Portugal in 1994 with the aim of producing basic benchmarks for recognition of learning in eight occupational sectors.

In Portugal, the process is slow and perhaps rather disappointing, in view of the sparse results, but he thought one must be pragmatic and that such certification can be introduced only gradually, starting with the branches and skills that give rise to the fewest difficulties.

For his part, Mike Coles (QCA) picked up the question of the bridges to be built between the different training systems and the possible advantages for the formal training system if informal learning is taken into account and recognised.

He reported on the current debate in the United Kingdom on introducing the modularisation of certificates of skill, which could no doubt lead to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ), but also become part of a broader system of qualifications, including general qualifications.

According to Mike Coles, a preliminary advantage of the certification of non-formal prior learning is that it encourages individuals to enter training, a point also made by Éric Fries Guggenheim in his introductory paper.

He stressed the need, whatever the system set up, for the credits (modules) and qualifications to be coherently linked one to another in a national qualifications system. He also – and in this respect his opinion echoed that of Jens Bjørnåvold – emphasised the need to establish links between formal training and non-formal training. It is important, he said, that everybody – student or 'learner' – should be able to perceive the links and progression between the stage already reached and the next stage.

Lastly, he stated that the process of validation of non-formal learning can pinpoint shortcomings in the formal system, since non-formal learning is more likely to develop where there is a lack of formal learning. Its role as a detector of inadequacies, then, will help to improve the formal training system.

Donal Kerr (FÁS), following the same train of thought, also felt that a clear distinction should be made between access to education and access to certification. Under the Irish approach to the validation and certification of informal learning, what are validated are skills, not courses.

On the other hand, he subscribed to the need to establish a link between formal and informal training; in this context, he saw it as essential that the same certificate be awarded, however the skills and knowledge have been acquired – formally or informally. Nevertheless, he noted with regret the resistance among teachers and trainers to the validation of experience-based learning. He thought the reason for this resistance was that the validation of experience-based learning in a way detracts from their power, in that they lose control over the training pathway because the results of training are specified by someone other than themselves.

Finally he stressed the importance of the material recognition of qualifications – including non-formal qualifications – particularly in terms of pay, if it is hoped to encourage people to embark on a process of lifelong training.

12.1.3. General discussion

The purpose of the open discussion at the end of the first session was to arrive at a common core view of the validation of non-formal prior learning, the points of agreement and the points of contention in our efforts to develop the validation of prior learning.

Essentially the debate centred on two sets of questions: those associated with the material recognition of prior learning (certificates, pay) and those associated with what is being certified, mainly the contrast between technical skills and core skills.

The material recognition of learning

According to Stavros Stavrou (Deputy Director of Cedefop), the determining factor in the recognition of prior learning is recognition in terms of pay, and in informal training the essential dividing line is between informal training recognised by the employer and giving rise to a pay increase, and other training, not recognised within the enterprise.

Marie-Helene Ska (*Confédération belge des syndicats chrétiens* – CSC) then queried the ways of establishing a link between the new forms of validation of skills or learning and how they are to be reflected in pay procedures in a country such as Belgium, where there is a national system of linking a number of qualifications with pay scales (collective labour agreements).

Donal Kerr (FÁS) went further, saying that in his opinion the true challenge is that recognition of the validation of prior learning should be placed on the same footing as for the validation of initial training.

In Germany, as pointed out by Nikolaus Bley (DGB – German Trade Union Confederation), the problem arises mainly as part of the issue of mobility. Training or informal prior learning may be reflected in terms of pay and/or responsibilities in one workplace. But if for one reason or another an employee has to change employer (due to a company going out of business, for example, a frequent occurrence with SMEs), he or she will not find the same level of pay and responsibilities, since the knowledge informally acquired will not be recognised outside the first enterprise.

The relationship between formal training and pay is clear-cut. It is far less so between informal training and pay.

There is a real paradox, moreover, according to Burkart Sellin (Cedefop). Informal skills are generally regarded as very important by all the parties concerned but, at the same time, it is hard to ensure that they are recognised, certified and, above all, financially rewarded.

Riel Miller (OECD) argued, on the other hand, that although there is an understandable demand for the material recognition of prior learning, such a claim should not lead to a breakdown in the negotiations between the practitioners and the social partners. Riel Miller saw a need for a complete rethink of our ideas when dealing with the issue of the 'recognition of qualifications and remuneration'.

Within an enterprise, employees are not only suppliers but also providers. They may be willing to work for an employer for a certain time for relatively low pay, provided they realise they are learning something useful there and that this newly acquired skill will help them sell themselves at a higher rate elsewhere later on.

It is this latter point, however, which in fact creates the problem, asserted Eugenio Rosa (CGTP) in reporting on experience in Portugal. That country's unions have always tried to have work experience taken into account when establishing the rates of pay laid down by collective agreements. But they have always come up against the employers' reluctance to accept this, and it has never been possible to impose a system of remuneration that reflects both formal qualifications and informal skills, except in certain special cases. One of the exceptions has been the case of nurses: the number of years' experience combined with supplementary training has in fact been taken into account when nurses aspire to the higher echelons at the end of their careers.

In the opinion of Donal Kerr (FÁS), employers are reluctant to recognise non-formal prior learning, arguing that this may generate difficulties for them, especially in the form of wage pressure. However, he pointed out, there are advantages for the employers as well. Of course there are benefits for employees, and it is likely that the recognition of qualifications will enable them to obtain better pay. But the benefit to employers is just as great. Up to now, it has been the schools and training institutions that have set the standards. Nowadays, power is being restored to the workplace; employers are once again able to say exactly what they want. Furthermore, through methods of accreditation of prior learning (APL), the true value of workers' skills can more readily be monitored. In addition, the accreditation of prior learning gives employers a far clearer idea of their employees' training needs. Lastly, the accreditation of learning offers a picture of the skills within the workplace, in turn making recruitment more effective in that employers are better placed to decide on the new skills they need to acquire.

Donal Kerr concluded that the union/employer (employee/enterprise) relationship is far more complex than might be thought from the comments made up to then.

More or less along the same lines, as pointed out by Petri Haltia (research worker at the Finnish University of Turku), in Finland when employers are asked about their requirements, in general they do not know exactly what they want, merely replying that they seek key skills and generic skills, which does not help much.

Donal Kerr replied that the same problem exists in Ireland, but that employers can also be helped to define their needs more clearly.

Technical skills versus core skills: what is being certified?

The second part of the discussion was essentially based on the difficulties in recognising and certifying generic skills. It was opened by Burkart Sellin (Cedefop), who pointed out that there is a radical difference between technical skills, which are relatively easy to measure, and generic skills (methodological skills, problem-solving, decision-making, social skills, etc.), which are very hard to measure, especially as they are acquired by informal means.

Juan María Menéndez-Valdés (Spanish Confederation of Employers' Associations – CEOE) said he fully agreed with the need to distinguish between these different types of skill. He added that Spanish employers did not regard it as very desirable to try to set up the recognition

of informally acquired generic skills. It is up to the employer, at the time of recruitment and during the probationary period, to try to review and detect such skills. But, apart from the fact that this type of certification is certainly very costly for an enterprise, in his opinion the validity and reliability of the certification of this type of skills are very doubtful. Juan María Menéndez-Valdés thought it was not worth the trouble of issuing accreditation for this type of competence. Nor, more broadly, did he consider that 'paper qualifications' solve this type of problem. He even deplored the *'certificate fixation'* (excessive reliance on diplomas) afflicting the various partners on the Spanish labour market, including entrepreneurs, saying that he had a strong suspicion that it would be found elsewhere in Europe too, including in the European Commission. On the other hand, he saw it as essential to introduce training courses that might develop such core or generic skills as part of continuing training.

Having said that, he was entirely in favour of the certification of experience-based learning for other types of skill. Employers, in common with employees, are among the first to call for transparency on the labour market, for it leads – as pointed out by Donal Kerr – to the better use of human resources and greater suitability for the job. The sooner the certification of informal qualifications arrives the better it will be: employers will manage their jobs better and employees will manage their skills better.

It was merely that he did not consider certification to be justified in the case of certain skills such as key, transferable skills.

Donal Kerr (FÁS) commented that it is not so much the contrast between technical skills and key skills that creates the problem as knowing what is being certified. He pointed out that, in his view – one that also emerged in the contribution by Eugenio Rosa (CGTP) to the first round table – the challenge of the accreditation of prior learning (APL) is recognition of actual skills, however they may have been acquired. It is not a matter of the recognition of training. Donal Kerr considered that Nikolaus Bley, for example, placed too much emphasis on the need to recognise non-formal training, in particular continuing training. Donal Kerr felt that it was not so much the training that was being recognised as the standard skills acquired in relation to what employers were looking for. However that may be, it was not a matter of issuing a certificate testifying to attendance of a course, even though the competence that is to be assessed has been acquired through taking that course. What should be certified is not what a person has retained from a course but an employee's actual skill having regard to the needs of the employer in a working situation.

Eugenio Rosa (CGTP) shared to some extent the views of Donal Kerr, saying that attendance of a course is of interest in itself, as is a certificate of successful acquisition of what has been taught. He saw the two types of certification as separate and as complementary. On the other hand it was evident that a certificate of success in acquiring knowledge in no way prejudges competence in the workplace, nor can it in any way replace a certificate testifying to vocational competence. The type of competence certified is different.

12.2. The methodology of accrediting prior learning

12.2.1. Preliminary papers

Barbara Jones [45] ***and Kari Hadjivassiliou*** [46] **– *'The smart card project'***

The Tavistock Institute has conducted a research project entitled COMPETE on the advisability and feasibility of methods of certification based on new technology: smart cards, electronic forums, distance training and certification, etc. This research was conducted on behalf of the European Commission which, towards the mid-1990s, was hoping to find a flexible system of accreditation that could be used to adapt the very wide variety of European training systems so as to cross transnational barriers and promote lifelong training. It hoped to see how European cross-border recognition of qualifications could be developed and to acquire computerised instruments that the Commission called *passports* or *skill cards*.

The Commission wanted an inventory of what was being done in the United States, as it thought that the US would be more advanced than Europe. In fact it was realised that this was not the case. There are 50 different systems in the United States. Accreditation there tends to take place by peer assessment. There is no centralisation and regulation, and only slow progress is being made towards determining standards of competence.

As regards vocational training, Americans lag far behind Europeans; in particular, smart cards are little used. In the general use of smart cards, moreover, it is Europe that has made the most progress. And even in Europe, where smart card technology is relatively advanced, it seems to be difficult to adapt it to the recognition of learning, or at least nowhere at present is it used for this purpose.

The greatest advances found by the Tavistock Institute was in the development of O*NET (*Occupational and classification system*). This is a collective venture under the US Department of Labor, whose aim is to replace the former (paper) dictionary of occupations launched in 1930, which was intended to help the unemployed to find jobs. It is to go on-line and its content will be constantly improved.

Little of what is being done in the United States, then, can be incorporated in Europe, even disregarding the fact that it is hard to transfer experience because of the socio-cultural and institutional differences between the US and the European Union.

([45]) Manchester University.

([46]) Tavistock Institute.

Kari Hadjivassiliou

Kari Hadjivassiliou gave a detailed description of the COMPETE research project launched by the Commission. This project is concentrating on the search for methods of creating the European skill accreditation system discussed by Barbara Jones.

The idea is to provide citizens with a skills accreditation mechanism that can be accessed at all times, enabling them to validate their skills however they may have been acquired, on the basis of a standardised skills framework. In working towards this, recourse to new technologies performs a central role. Two main electronic applications are being considered:

(a) smart cards or portable skill cards, to enable individuals to record their training, qualifications and/or experience, together with other particulars, by means of a PC;

(b) on-line evaluation systems and electronic tests, to help individuals to obtain qualifications or value units which, in turn, could be recorded in their personal cards.

Given this, Kari Hadjivassiliou, in common with Barbara Jones, is a little sceptical about information and communication technologies. Of course we are impressed by modern technology, she said, but we must be aware that certain key questions first need to be clarified, especially the way in which skills and qualifications are defined and recognised, as regards the incompatibilities (or at least the tensions) existing between individualistic approaches to defining skills and approaches in terms of the socio-cultural environment, in the contradictions between education/training and the needs of industry and in the contrast between practical and theoretical skills (doing and thinking).

This latter point arises in particular in the case of on-line assessment: how can achievements be tested when they call for physical effort?

Kari Hadjivassiliou saw the two key points as: obtaining consensus on the meaning of the term 'competence'; and, on this subject, solving the problem of the tensions and contradictions between globalisation and the process of 'localisation' or 'regionalisation' in the changing European economy.

Anne-Marie Charraud

The concept of validation includes the concept of measuring, and measuring always exists by reference to a reference or standard, a benchmark. One of the main questions running through the various contributions to this Agora was: *what benchmark are we going to choose?*

In France, we have made the decision and, up to today (March 1999), most of the validations we used to accredit experience are based on the same benchmarks as those employed to accredit training.

Although we constantly affirm that the learning acquired should be evaluated separately from the training system, we find it terribly hard to operate outside what we already know: the training schemes.

Another original feature of French experience is the fact that it uses the same certification to accredit what is acquired through initial training, training in the school, alternance training

and continuing training. We have also decided to use these same forms of certification to accredit experience-based knowledge, the idea being – as Donal Kerr has already reported in describing the example of Ireland – to avoid stigmatising the holders of such qualifications obtained by the accreditation of learning.

In France, the four main objectives pursued by the validation of learning are to:

(a) *exempt* a candidate *from the diploma* that in theory is required for admission to a training course;

(b) *provide exemption from part of a training pathway*, saving time and money, of particular importance in the case of continuing training organised in the workplace;

(c) *provide exemption from part of the tests leading to a diploma*, the principle of the 1992 law on the validation of vocational learning (VAP).

These first three objectives are very close to each other in spirit. The last one is different and is a departure from the others. It is to:

(d) *give* not exemption from testing but *a 'certificate of competence'*.

Certifying that someone is capable of performing a set of activities related to a job existing on the labour market, however, is a departure from what is traditionally assessed following a training course: the benchmark is changed. Most benchmarks constructed for training imply that what are being assessed are far broader activities than those associated with a specific job. It is well known that one of the basic objectives of training is to enable an individual to adapt to a set of situations. It is why it is often said that a diploma can be read as a means of defining a person's qualification. And it is clear that when one uses the word *'qualification'*, this does not mean the same as when the word *'competence'*.

In France, however, a change of direction has recently emerged. We started most of our experiments in the validation of learning by sticking close to the benchmarks we had constructed around the concept of qualification, and we think that the activity of working helps to develop a set of knowledge, expertise and procedural know-how that can be transferred to multiple work situations. This is the reason why we think that there are possible bridgeheads with the world of training. But very recently we have become aware that a whole segment of the population cannot immediately demonstrate this degree of qualification, but that these people too need legibility on the labour market. This has led to the fourth objective to which we have just referred: *'to certify that individuals in a given context can perform a certain activity within practical jobs existing on the labour market'*.

Implementing the validation of experience-based learning calls for a good deal of objective rethinking. At least four types of difficulty are encountered:

(a) the wording and content of the benchmarks;

(b) the validity and credibility of the actual operation of the validation of learning;

(c) the preparation of and support for the candidates for validation;

(d) the funding of the new social demand which has been created.

The wording and content of benchmarks

Most of the benchmarks have been formulated, in France at least, to validate what has been learned during a training course. If the aim is to assess what has been learned through experience, it is very difficult to find a list of data associated with the training curricula.

What is needed, then, is to rewrite the benchmarks for diplomas so that they apply both after a training course and to the validation of experience-based knowledge. In France, since 1990 in the Ministry for National Education and since 1998 in the Ministry for Employment and Solidarity, a start has been made on reformulating the benchmarks, beginning with a description of what is called a typical job. It was because the Education Ministry was the first to complete this redrafting of a number of benchmarks that it was the first to be able to implement a procedure for the validation of vocational learning (VAP). This approach has helped to maintain the principle to which we are very attached in France: the unified nature of diplomas or certifications whatever the method by which they have been obtained.

The validity and credibility of the actual operation of the validation of learning

The question is: *how can one ensure that the certification arising from a test taken on completion of a course has the same value as the certification of the development of knowledge and that one is as credible as the other*. This is the issue being debated in France.

If one of the aims of the validation of experience-based learning is to provide exemption from the tests giving rise to a diploma, the same system of evaluation as those employed to assess what has been acquired through training cannot logically be employed.

In fact, two approaches are adopted.

(a) The candidate's own declaration:

the candidate is given the opportunity to stand back and see his activity in perspective. He is asked to express and describe what he has done, so that he will have an idea of the nature of the activity performed, the resources he has deployed to do something and the resources used to learn to do it. It is from the information provided by the candidate himself that the appraisal board judges experience-based learning, compared with learning assessed by means of a diploma test. This is the approach taken by the Education Ministry and the Ministry for Youth and Sports. It has not gained wide acceptance, either in the world of training or in the working world. How can one accept the credibility and validity of an individual's own declaration on what he is doing? Moreover, how can the method be applied to other measures, where the important factor is *performance*?

(b) Observation by a third party:

starting with the idea that the test of whether a person possesses the elements of competence can be judged only by observation by a third party, assessment situations in an actual or simulated work situation are arranged, with the assessment often in fact being conducted by a trainer and a professional from the field in question.

This procedure tends to be the one adopted by the Ministry for Labour and Solidarity.

Preparation and support for candidates for validation

This is one of the subjects of discussion and debate in France. What can be done to help individuals who are seeking to gain recognition for experience-based learning,

(a) on the one hand to meet the institutions that are to validate that learning?

(b) on the other, to marshal and display what they have learned and thus to prepare for the practical process of validation?

The funding of this new social demand

Up to the present, in France there has been a right to training. Is the new direction to be towards a right to the certification and validation of one's experience-based learning? How is it to be funded? This is to be covered by the introduction of a law ([47]).

Petri Haltia

In Finland, the validation of prior learning is covered by the law on vocational training that came into force in 1994 and, in 1999, was incorporated in the broader act on adult training.

Examinations are arranged, which can be taken irrespective of how the skills have been acquired, i.e. through vocational training, work in the workplace or other means. If candidates succeed in these tests, they obtain a recognised qualification. At the present time there are over 300 types of vocational qualifications on three different levels. It is the Education Minister who determines the number and nature of the certificates of qualification, although in practice this is done on the proposal of the social partners and the National Education Council, an expert agency responsible for assisting the Minister on the subject of education policy.

([47]) On 19 December 2001 the French Parliament adopted the 'social modernisation bill'. Promulgated on 17 January 2002, this bill sets out important measures relating to vocational training and labour law.

It establishes the 'validation of experience-based learning' (VAE), i.e. the right of *'any person who has worked in an occupation, whether salaried or unsalaried or voluntary,'* to ask for *'the learning acquired through his experience to be validated, to justify all or part of the knowledge or abilities required in order to obtain a diploma or certificate issued, on behalf of the State, by a higher education establishment'*.

This validation is issued by a board *'having regard to a dossier compiled by the candidate and after an interview with him or after placing him in a working situation'. 'The board will also state the scope of the validation and, in the event of partial validation, will specify the nature of the knowledge and abilities that need to be investigated by further testing.'*

The 'social modernisation law' was published in *Journal officiel* no.15 of 18 January 2002, pages 1008-1052. An electronic version can be accessed from:

http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/citoyen/jorf_nor.ow ?numjo=MESX0000077L

For further information, see the Ministry for Employment and Solidarity website:

http:// www.travail.gouv.fr/dossiers/modernite_social.html

Qualifications consist of four to eight modules, which may be presented separately, although in Finland it is the qualification as a whole that is assessed; people do not make full use of the flexibility of the system.

The responsibility for preparing for the examinations lies with 'examination boards' (250 located throughout Finland), on which employers, employees and teachers/trainers are represented, although the examinations themselves are conducted by independent bodies that are generally not associated with the training agencies.

The tests of competence are laid down by the educational authorities in such a way that virtually any manner of verifying candidates' skills can be used. In practice, the idea is to organise tests that simulate as closely as possible actual working conditions and tasks. In brief, what the candidates are required to do in the tests is what they would do in their jobs. These tests, over a period of five days, take place on the job or, more commonly, in a simulated workshop in a training agency.

It is also possible to obtain a qualification or part of a qualification without taking a test, on presentation of a portfolio, although this option is seldom taken up.

Since the programme was introduced, about 10 000 people have obtained a qualification. This is not very many, given that 1 000 000 workers are in continuing training in Finland each year, but it is a lot compared with the 16 000 university degrees obtained per year.

Having described in detail the Finnish system of the validation of learning, Petri Haltia reported on a number of questions relating to experience in Finland, although these were also of broader interest.

First of all, what types of training or learning should be taken into account? The certificates are made up of 4 to 8 modules, but in some cases this seems excessive. In certain sectors, workers are so highly specialised that they can succeed in certain modules, but have no chance of passing all of them unless they take additional training. Admittedly, one of the explicit reasons for establishing the system is the rising standard of knowledge among the workforce, but the additional skills demanded might never be of practical use in a person's work, and it is only for the unemployed in search of a job that a broader qualification is bound to be useful.

It could also be asked whether the primary aim of the certification of learning has been achieved. Is it the people who have acquired their skills outside the formal training system who take examinations? If it is to be the prevailing practice in the future that people without prior experience take lengthy training courses in agencies already active in this field in order to sit the tests, we shall have a sort of school training leaving examination rather than a tool that can be used to test non-formal learning.

Furthermore, certain skills seem to be particularly hard to assess, such as generic skills. In the recommendations on vocational certification in Finland, their evaluation is advocated. However, with one exception (in the social sector), they are generally neglected.

In the words of the representative of Spanish employers to this Agora, Juan María Menéndez-Valdés, many assessors feel that there is no reliable way of assessing them. There are even those who say that there is too much emphasis nowadays on this type of competence.

Another type of question relates to the formal evaluation process, for it is important – as pointed out by Anne-Marie Charraud – that it should be recognised as valid and credible by the socio-economic environment. In the Finnish system the assessment of skills is defined by precise skill benchmarks, and the principle is that everyone should be credited with what he is capable of, what he has achieved and on what he is judged. This leads some people to say that the methods of assessing skills and training associated with this system are leading to a fragmentation of learning rather than developing critical thought and creativity. In reality those who organise the tests seem to be aiming at tasks making up an integrated whole, and the members of examination boards say that they look at performance overall, not just in detail. As experienced professionals, they also assess creativity and originality. They base their decisions on what they know of working life rather than arriving at them in the light of criteria passed on to them. But this also means that their judgement is not entirely transparent and unambiguous, as might be hoped of a judgement on skills.

In practice this means that a realistic view should be taken of what we require; one cannot expect people who have obtained certification to know how to do everything and to be capable of any job.

Furthermore, the reliability of certification certainly varies over time and depending on the examination centre. The proof is the fact that, contrary to the principle of competence-based assessment, many assessors arrive at their judgement only after they have seen the results of all candidates as a whole. The average competence of a group, the presence of exceptionally able candidates or, inversely, incompetent candidates may therefore shift the demarcation line between success and failure. This bias could possibly be corrected by improving the precision and detail of national recommendations (standards) or by recourse to a national examinations bank. Above all, reliability could be increased by organising fairly close national networks in which members of assessment boards can pool their ideas and interpretations and thus evolve a common understanding.

For the time being we have no proof that the labour market recognises this type of qualification but, as indicated by Mike Coles and Anne-Marie Charraud, the question of the recognition of qualifications and the non-stigmatisation of certifications of experience-based learning is of considerable interest in the validation of learning.

Lastly, Petri Haltia pointed out that the system set up is exclusively based on skills acquired directly in working life. People, however, are learning all the time, and such forms of learning are not covered by the tests already described. The Finnish Committee for the development of lifelong learning sees this as only the start of a broader system. But there is no inkling at the moment of what that system might be like.

Marian Nieskens and Ruud Klarus

In the Netherlands, the system of validation of non-formal learning is still only in the experimental phase, unlike the situation in Finland or France.

Two validation methodologies were presented by our Dutch colleagues:

(a) the first is based on a portfolio of skills that can be used to obtain credits for parts of certification. This shortens the training time needed for obtaining full certification, i.e. the standard training on the labour market, somewhat similar to the VAP arrangement set up in France by the Education Ministry;

(b) the second, which may take longer, is also based on a portfolio of skills, but in addition it entails the assessment of skills on the job, during performance of authentic tasks.

Marian Nieskens, in the light of her experience, did not think that the assessment of authentic tasks, which adds to the social cost of validation and prolongs the procedure for the individual, has any real extra advantage compared with the method based on a portfolio alone.

In fact, either method may be applied, depending on the sector and its specific demands.

The validation of learning is the result of the new law on adult training and two government recommendations, one on employability, the other on lifelong training, which have given considerable support to experiments in terms of funding and the goodwill of industry and education.

The standards themselves, however, are the outcome of empirical research and negotiation between the social partners.

The importance of the portfolio in the process in the Netherlands, however, is linked with the concept of competence held in that country: competence, according to Ruud Klarus, is a holistic concept bringing together both cognitive abilities and practical abilities, as well as attitudes (capacity to analyse and tackle problems, for example).

Lastly, Ruud Klarus and Marian Nieskens saw the question of validity and reliability, also discussed by previous speakers, as a key issue. And yet – and this might seem paradoxical – validity and reliability should not really be the prime concern. To a great extent, it is a question of method and the standardisation of criteria. But as to method and standards, said Ruud Klarus, *'we are working on them'* in consultation with the social partners, teachers and trainers and the political authorities. Attention should above all be paid to the transparency of the procedure. Any candidate wishing to take advantage of the measure must be able to find out right from the start how he will be assessed, what the procedure is, etc. And objectivity, which is a way of aiming at reliability, implies that the assessors, as well as the advisers helping the candidate, should be properly trained, since assessment with this type of procedure is very different from assessment in the traditional educational channels ('examination').

The development of procedures for the evaluation of experience-based learning, therefore, has to create a delicate balance of at least four dimensions:

(a) *acceptability*: it is not enough to hope for the development of this type of procedure, candidates must also accept it, as must employers,

(b) *reliability*: a qualification must not be awarded too easily; on the other hand, there must be transparency in its recognition and certification,

(c) *cost*: the future of the procedure depends on its accessibility and social feasibility; employers themselves are of course well aware of the cost of this procedure, and the return it might generate by reducing training time,

(d) *generality*: care must be taken that validation, while still being in line with the process of work, is nonetheless sufficiently general. What one does in a workplace will not always be usable outside, or the cost might encourage the employer to confine itself to what is useful within the workplace.

The characteristics of the learning assessment method used in the Netherlands are a significant reflection of the search for this balance:

(a) validation in the light of standardised criteria,

(b) realistic assessment, through observation of what people do,

(c) congruity between the working process and the method of evaluating people,

(d) transparency: people have to know everything about the process they will be going through,

(e) accessibility in terms of procedure and funding.

Lastly, as regards the prospects for learning validation procedures in the Netherlands, the best way of developing them is to start from the base and work upwards. Individuals, the candidates, trainers, heads of personnel and individual employers are the best advocates of the system. If the global system is tackled there is a risk of overlooking the individual, something that will endanger the whole procedure.

12.2.2. General discussion on assessment methodologies

The debate was essentially based around four main themes. Here we have summarised and classified the various contributions in the light of these four themes.

(a) Our vision of the validation of learning is still over-influenced by the traditional systems of teaching.

(b) Smart card technologies.

(c) Why certify non-formal skills?

(d) The legitimacy of skills portfolios as an instrument of validation.

We are too conservative, too bound by teaching systems

Riel Miller

Riel Miller felt that we are trying to introduce certification for the things that we think we are capable of certifying, whereas we should be certifying things for which there is a need and where the jobs of the future lie.

In essence we are moving towards vocational certification. We are doing so cautiously and with precision, taking particular care that the certification matches up to occupational references or standards. But there is a completely different field, a field associated with the development of the Internet, with the learning society, with this emerging society in which the economy is project-based and in which the type of validation and certification that we need may perhaps be quite separate from occupational criteria or standards.

In this context, doubtless we do not need formal certification; mere approval by a third party may be sufficient. This brings us to what Juan María Menéndez-Valdés said on the validation of generic skills.

What we need is no doubt a diversity of levels of training. Not all jobs, not all tasks, call for the same degree of robustness in certification. I am afraid that what we have been presented is not flexible enough, is not looking far enough into the future, is too closely linked to training institutions.

One might wonder whether – and this is perhaps easier to conceive in the American model – a competition-based system ('I offer you certification as a business firm, you buy my certification') might not be better geared to wider diversity, with different forms of validation and certification and with forms that are not all tied to the school system.

Donal Kerr

Donal Kerr thought that Riel Miller had introduced a new dimension into the discussion. He felt that one of the reasons why we are so conservative in our approach is that we work with our teachers and they immediately attack any certification that is less robust than what they produce themselves.

Donal Kerr was interested by the contribution from Petri Haltia, who had told us that in Finland research on reference criteria for the certification of work experience is conducted by the Education Ministry. In Ireland, where FÁS has embarked on the construction of reference criteria, it is extremely hard to enlist the Department of Education in this research. In fact, the Department officials are constantly in search of 25% or 50% compensation systems or bridges, but are hesitant about the award of full certification.

Hans Bauer ([48])

There is in practice a contradiction between

(a) the fact that growing importance is being attached to the learning processes, both informal and non-formal, which should cause us to wonder whether our formal learning process is not taking the wrong route, and

(b) the fact that, in everything that has been said up to this time in this Agora on the different models of evaluation, the benchmarks – the reference criteria – are ultimately always derived from the formal process and from the traditional standards of training.

It is a contradiction, but at the same time it is legitimate. The contradiction comes from the fact that one of the main aims of the certification of experience-based learning is to compensate for shortcomings of training in the areas where the disadvantaged exist: individuals who do not fall in the official categories of our vocational system. One of the central points is their training in new occupational skills.

Nikolaus Bley ([49])

Referring to what was said by Riel Miller, Nikolaus Bley stressed that, even admitting that – due to developments in employment – it might be of absolutely no importance for some 20% of the population to have a certificate, there remains 80% of the population who must be a focus of interest and who, in the future, whether in 20 or 30 years, will need the certification just as much, in the service sector or elsewhere.

For the great body of the population, both before and after training, continuing training and continuing certification are still essential.

Riel Miller

Riel Miller did not deny that in the economy of the future there will still be people working in industrial production. But in the learning society industry will no longer be the dominant factor. No doubt we shall have to fight on the two fronts in terms of public policy and seek replies to the following two questions:

(a) How can the system as we know it today be improved, awarding individuals certification of the skills they have acquired in such a way as to avert the need for them to go back to school?

(b) How can we prepare for the forthcoming economy, the learning economy, which will be crucial for growth and wealth creation over the next 25 years?

([48]) *Gesellschaft für Ausbildungsforschung und Berufsentwicklung* (GAB – Association for research on training and vocational development), Munich, Germany.

([49]) *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund – Bildungswerk*.

Smart cards

Donal Kerr

Donal Kerr was surprised that the Tavistock Institute had not cited practical instances of skills cards in Europe and asked the representatives of the team if they had found any. He then showed the Agora the card issued by the FÁS: the national craft certificate, which is awarded to certify craft qualifications acquired in the workshop and in actual jobs. This card is like a credit card. It is given to the holder at the same time as the full paper certificate. It is signed by the holder, but does not store magnetic information, quite simply because employers do not yet have magnetic card readers and by the time they do the technology will doubtless have changed.

As regards the international dimension, the FÁS has done no more than to translate the message on the card into four languages: German, English, French and Irish.

Jens Bjørnåvold

Returning to the observations on the Tavistock Institute, Jens Bjørnåvold also felt that too little information had been given. He had a whole set of questions that he would have liked to be discussed on the technology of the cards, the information medium. Is it possible to record non-formal learning or assessed and recognised experience on a computer-produced card or by other electronic means? What are the limitations of this input methodology? There must be certain limitations and Jens Bjørnåvold felt it was important to make these apparent and to state when and where other methodologies would have to be used. Where is the dividing line between the automated certification of a smart card and more complicated forms of evaluation based on dialogue and the skills portfolio, such as those described by Anne-Marie Charraud or Marian Nieskens and Ruud Klarus? This dividing line is fairly important.

Kari Hadjivassiliou

Kari Hadjivassiliou reminded her hearers that she had concluded her talk by an appeal for caution in the way skills are being defined and the way experience-based learning is being certified, particularly as regards the differences between the ways of measuring practical skills and theoretical skills. The Tavistock Institute team is fully aware of these limitations and has adopted a very cautious attitude to the applicability of the smart card. The members of the team wanted to approach this in an agnostic frame of mind, trying to test whether it was applicable or not.

They did not necessarily subscribe to the idea that new technologies are the best and that the smart card will solve all the problems of accreditation and certification of experience-based learning.

Barbara Jones

Barbara Jones said that she did not see Donal Kerr's question on the existence in Europe of skills cards, smart cards, etc. as appropriate. In fact, they had not sought any in Europe.

For the United States, on the other hand, they had drawn up a list of the smart cards, edu-cards and others that the project had been asked to study. She pointed out that the Tavistock team as a whole is fairly sceptical about the use of skills media. Nevertheless, if one takes the proposals of O*NET, essentially aimed towards collating occupational families by affinity groups and breaking down standards to reveal the content and sub-assembly of competence attributes characteristic of the skills required, this is another matter: no such thing exists in Europe. This does not necessarily produce a skills card. In fact, the use of the term 'smart card' is a little misleading. We tend to use this term for all the skills-related media, which is no doubt excessive.

Hans Bauer

Regarding the question from Jens Bjørnåvold on the frontier between what is computerised certification and other forms of validation, Hans Bauer felt that, given the extreme speed of development in vocational skills, by the time one succeeds in defining a very elaborate standard of reference it is already out of date, which again raises the question of informal competence – always more important than recognised, accumulated competence.

But this type of informal competence, in anticipation of the future, is never discussed. We have talked about it here a little in the discussion on generic skills: the ability to anticipate, intuition, associative thought, etc., i.e. the skills that will be vital in the future both in industry and in the service sector.

But here we have a whole set of skills that are absolutely non-objective – indeed, they are subjective - and these cannot really be transferred to a magnetic skills card, a smart card.

The importance of certification

Ruud Klarus

Ruud Klarus spoke of the importance attached to obtaining diplomas, to obtaining certificates. This has been demonstrated by research conducted in the Netherlands on employability on the labour market. There are various factors explaining why people do or do not obtain jobs. A person is more likely to succeed on the labour market if he is young, white and male. On the other hand, if you are from a disadvantaged group, if you are a woman, if you come from abroad, etc., the only thing you can change is the certificates you hold. The only thing you can do to improve your chances on the labour market is to acquire diplomas, and of course there are sectors in which this is of greater importance: it is more relevant to work in the health professions than to working on the Internet.

Eric Fries Guggenheim

Up to now we have in essence been talking about the validation of learning as a function of work, and it is true that this is one of the main motivations. But the human being is a whole that cannot be cut up into slices. Access to a job and improving one's working conditions affect other facets of an individual's life – civic and family life, for example. And in particular the validation of learning, through the effect it may have on an individual's self-esteem and his relationship with knowledge and education, may be a stimulus for training in general. The validation of learning, therefore, is a powerful weapon in the campaign against social divisions, in that it helps to integrate workers in the workplace and citizens in society, making them more effective workers of course but above all enriching them as citizens.

Question on the legitimacy of skills portfolios in the experience in the Netherlands

Niels Jørgen Nordbøge

Niels Jørgen Nordbøge as an official concerned with citizens' rights, raised a question about their channels of recourse after they have been assessed, if they feel that the assessment is not correct.

His question was addressed fairly directly to the Dutch delegation, because it had been particularly concerned with individual assessment by means of a portfolio. The work done by STOAS is a professional study deserving the greatest respect, but what is the status of STOAS? Is it a private, public or semi-public agency? The question could also be asked about any agencies that might issue any smart cards. And – the second question on the subject – what can an individual do if he is not happy with the verdict?

Juan María Menéndez-Valdés

Juan María Menéndez-Valdés also asked about the portfolio, in particular the number of portfolios already produced, the type of infrastructure available for setting them up, and 'who' bears the cost of this portfolio. The recognition of qualifications is all-important in a country like Spain, the European country that enjoys the sad privilege of having the highest unemployment rate in the European Union.

Ruud Klarus and Marian Nieskens

Skills portfolios are at present produced in the educational system, and the resources come from the bodies requiring them – in other words, the schools, enterprises or employment agencies, depending on the place where the portfolio is created. Experience with skills portfolios is recent, and there are still only a few portfolios, about a thousand.

As regards accreditation for awarding certification, neither CINOP nor STOAS is accredited. In fact, certification is established by the regional training centres under the control of the

institutions administering vocational training at national level. Any appeals, therefore, go through these institutions and the education authorities.

12.3. The prerequisites for the successful validation of vocational learning

12.3.1. Preliminary papers

Jens Bjørnåvold (Cedefop): the question of legitimacy

The evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning is not a purely technical and instrumental issue related to the issue of documents. In fact it is a question of the transformation of 'values' accepted and recognised as legitimate by the essential parties: the State, employers, employees, families.

The question of the legitimacy of the process of evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning is of crucial importance. The validity and reliability of evaluation and recognition methods are of course very important, but unless the exercise of the validation of learning in itself is regarded as pertinent by the parties concerned, it will still be pointless, however valid and reliable, and it would be more worthwhile to economise on the resources committed towards it.

The monetary analogy is useful in this respect. Just as the value of money is related not to the value of the currency paper or to how well it is printed but to the confidence it inspires it (fiduciary money), the value of the certification of validated learning lies above all in its social recognition, in its legitimacy.

To establish a relationship of confidence in favour of the certification of non-formal learning, third parties must be offered a guarantee that the documents provide a true picture of a person's useful skills.

According to Jens Bjørnåvold, this should be achieved by a twofold, complementary movement:

(a) top-down: the State and educational authorities issue the certificates and diplomas as they have always done, but in constant consultation with the essential parties, the employers and employees,

(b) bottom-up: enterprises and sectors of industry draw up agreements defining the regulations or standards of competence for the sector in question.

In both cases, the recognition of informally acquired skills raises the question of pay. To the extent that the accreditation of non-formal skills legitimately reflects actual values, the skills

innate or embodied in individuals, the question of pay increases, changes in positions within the workplace and new recruitment opportunities is just as legitimate and cannot be evaded.

It is, then, understandably important that the documents testifying to validated skills should reflect a true picture of useful skills, which then, and only then, brings us to the technical problem of standardisation: how can sound information be supplied?

Jose Danilo (CFDT): the political, economic and social challenges of the validation of learning

The experiments evaluating informally-learned skills are still too recent, at least in France, and are still very limited.

An individual's competence is still on the whole assessed by means of a diploma. Although this format is relatively well suited to measuring skills acquired as part of initial training, however, it is not very appropriate for the validation of new skills acquired as part of an occupation, even less so in less formal situations such as association or union activities.

Since the early 1970s, vocational training has become a strong social concern. However its results – albeit far from negligible – are still not enough, especially because a large proportion of low-skilled workers do not benefit from the various training measures set up.

It is this consideration which has increasingly directed employee training policy towards the 'qualifying route' approach, one of whose starting points is the recognition of learning.

What is at issue is lifelong qualification, and it is the responsibility of the social partners to create the conditions that will make it possible to achieve this objective. We are clearly faced with a challenge, with the recognition of learning being a condition of both the mobility and the social cohesion that are needed.

In France, the employers themselves (MEDEF) are developing a whole new attitude to skills. Of course their objectives are closely targeted to profitability and flexibility. MEDEF sees the enhancement of skills as the way of adapting individual profiles to the workplace context, as a preparation for lifelong job mobility and as an improvement in productivity. And although employers stress the role of the enterprise in the construction of competence, they also strongly emphasise the responsibility of the individual and the restructuring of work organisation.

The unions for their part see it as essential to succeed in analysing the new forms of the validation of learning that are now being set up to determine whether they can really be used to *place a proper value* on skills. From the union standpoint, the questions are about the uses that will be made of a given validation measure and about the economic and social reasons that will bring pressure to bear for its diffusion and popularisation.

One of the essential problems in this debate is *the risk of the disappearance of collective career management frameworks*. It is easy to perceive the changes that would arise with the

management of human resources if the reference to qualifications is replaced by the logic of competence. This evolution would lead to the personalisation of the contract of employment, something that is not desirable in the eyes of the unions. On the other hand, a logic of *placing a proper value on individuals*, translated into the collective framework, bears the seeds of a new dynamic.

Moreover, the unions must also think about the coherence of the different systems of training/validation/accreditation, in an effort to attain transparency. The social partners have an important regulatory role, but employees' unions too often leave the use of training systems to the employers and the public and private training bodies.

Lastly, union practices should be updated to promote the conditions and the environment that would encourage employees to achieve validation and extend their qualifications: the unions should help to identify the needs; they should see the organisation of work as a condition for producing skills; they should renegotiate the effects of the validation of skills on classification tables (pay scales) to make them more realistic; they should integrate the 'training validation' part of an individual's life into the broader issue of reducing working hours.

12.3.2. Discussion on the economic and social challenges posed by the validation of job-related learning and its legitimacy

Riel Miller felt that the essential question was the way of emitting signals in a process of investment, the allocation of flows and of the stocks of human capital. He thought, then, that the comparison with money was interesting.

But there is a need to look further. Money is not always produced just by the State or the banks, it is also generated by individuals.

He then referred back to his paper on the first day of Agora V. Why not quite simply reach an agreement as to the fact that certification is something that can be produced by any authorised and accredited person and why cannot it just be left to the market to test the different types of certification, to identify which of them are useful, which of them have clients both employers and employees?

We would then come back to the parallel with money. Just as in the case of money, the role of the State would be one of initiative and overall regulation.

If moreover we wish to go on using this financial metaphor, money is not the most appropriate asset. A building too is an asset and it has far more parallels with human capital than does money. Money is very liquid, something that is far from the case with human capital. Human capital is always harder to convert into purchasing and selling, and it takes far more time to be built up than simple liquid assets.

But apart from this reservation, I feel that the parallel is very interesting, especially in relation to the role the State is called upon to perform. It raises questions very close to those tackled in

the financial sector when we come to issues of social equality. How can the financial sector be opened out to people when they have only few resources?

The role of the State is very interesting and important in terms of opening up access to the validation of skills. The parallel is, then, very appropriate. However, after all that has been said in this Agora V, Riel Miller clearly felt that we are moving in the direction of a State monopoly and that we are trying to impose uniform and standardised forms. This takes us away from the diversity and differentiation that competition would permit if the process of certification were opened to the market. But to return to money and financing, if only the State banks could say 'that's good, that's bad', it would soon become apparent that the economy would work less efficiently.

Eric Fries Guggenheim then took up the contribution of Riel Miller again.

Admittedly there are several types of bodies and institutions that issue money. A bill of exchange issued by an individual is money. But all these forms of money are valid in our system only because there is a single yardstick, a national currency and now, in Europe, the euro. A euro is a euro, whether it is issued by the BNP, the Banque Populaire or the European Central Bank. It is this that is important in Jens Bjørnåvold's metaphor. Certifications have to be recognised and accepted by everyone in the geographical area in question, just as money is; socially, it must have a meaning. It is not enough for it to be issued at an individual level. Moreover, it is quite unacceptable to have different types of certification that in the end mark the individuals that hold them. If there is a type of certification that is awarded to young people with a low level of education, recognising that they have learned certain things, they are given a piece of paper, and what happens? They have a piece of paper that is given to young people of low educational attainment and, when they present themselves to an employer, he merely looks at the paper and knows that the young person in front of him is under-educated. This, however, is not our objective.

What interests us in the certification and particularly the validation of learning is that a young person with a low level of education but with skills and knowledge should have those skills and that knowledge recognised, so that he can obtain the certifications that correspond to the only sound and real, money, the sole currency. In other words, he should be able to commit himself again to a general process of training and possibly find a job on the labour market corresponding to what he knows how to do.

Moreover, how can Riel Miller think about selling certifications? A certificate testifies to competence, which is a quality linked to an individual. How can a certificate of quality be sold? Quality is related to a social and cultural context, a collective judgement. It cannot be bought and sold. It is, moreover, for this reason that the concept of competence is dangerous; on this point Eric Fries Guggenheim shares the view of Jose Danilo. Entrepreneurs have only one idea, that individual competence and nothing else should be recognised. Why? Because entrepreneurs reason in neoclassical terms. They think work should be remunerated according to its marginal productivity. But very fortunately, up to now in our systems, things do not happen in this way. Everything is framed in collective bargaining which, for its part, prefers

the concept of qualification. Everything is governed by a number of principles that mean that in the end the entrepreneur is confronted with a labour collective. In this collective some people are productive, others less so, some people are quick, others slower, some people are intelligent, others stupid. And the same applies to any social group. The interest of the concept of qualification is that it gives access to the labour collective, it is that the holder gains recognition of the right to a place in the enterprise, in the organisation, etc., whatever his actual competence compared with other members of the collective. It is the collective that produces and, depending one's qualification, one is entitled to a share of what is produced, whether one is 'paralytic' or a 'marathon runner', whatever one's personal qualities. And this is essential. The concept of qualification is an *integrating* concept. The concept of competence is a *discriminating* concept. Pressure for the seeking of competence is pressure for diluting the social corpus, it is pressure towards the individual fight for existence. It is in fact this systematic search for efficiency, for productivity, that ultimately leads to the total loss of human values in our Western societies. So if, at the present time, we are encountering so many difficulties, especially among young people in the towns, it is because of this cascade of exclusion situations arising from the relentless quest for competitiveness, individual profitability and personal advantages to the detriment of solidarity, shared commitment and collective bargaining.

In reply, Riel Miller said that even though there were good grounds for Eric Fries Guggenheim's concern, it is incorrect. The existence of a single unit of account is no guarantee of respect for social rights or even of transparency, although it may contribute towards it. A single unit of account will never prevent people from making distinctions between the creditworthy and the uncreditworthy, nor banks from keeping black lists, etc.

We find in fact that, in our days, people are not really entitled to the recognition of their human capital, unless they go through the State monopoly. And, according to Riel Miller, there is a sort of implicit collusion between the State and the employers in refusing to recognise people's human capital, because, as Jean Michel Joubier has said, when one sells one's working strength on the market, if there is a recognition of human capital, one is in a better position. It is a very radical stance to say that we should develop systems of recognition of the value of human capital because, up to now, most of the capital has always been held by the wealthy, by the banks and by the State.

Riel Miller saw it as important, then, not to fall into the trap posed by this question of the unique nature of the unit of measurement and of a single currency backed by the State. He felt that the challenge is how to create a diversity that reflects the diversity of the human condition, and he considered it highly improbable that a device dominated by the State, a standard system of priorities, would be capable of responding to this human diversity and of fully recognising the human capital that is our principal wealth.

Maria Helene Ska (*Confédération des syndicats chrétiens de Belgique*) then reminded the Agora that it is essential to maintain coherence in the system of qualifications and jobs. It is in fact the role of the State to impose coherence and to ensure that the pathways taken by

individuals are transparent to all the parties involved. It is undeniable that the number of operators is proliferating in our societies of today. A whole series of certifications are awarded today by private firms, especially in the field of information technology. Moreover, their life span is usually fairly short. Without the intervention of the State jointly with the social partners to introduce a measure of coherence, the system would become totally opaque and illegible.

By this action in favour of coherence, the State performs one of its essential roles: ensuring social cohesion.

The question then arises of who is the legitimate authority for regulating the field of validation of skills. This is a very important question, because it is at this level that the links are probably created with classifications, collective agreements and pay. The parties concerned are the State and the social partners, as is evident. What is less evident is the level at which regulation should take place. Taking the example of Belgium, vocational training is the responsibility of the regions, collective agreements and labour law are a national responsibility, and on top of this there is also the European level. At what level, then, can or should regulation be introduced?

Burkart Sellin considered that this question of what body is legitimately in a position to recognise and validate learning is one of the crucial questions in the debate.

When a portion of the State monopoly is challenged, as was the case with the law of 1971 in France, where a large proportion of the State's prerogative was reassigned to the social partners, the changes generated also affect other elements associated with the State monopoly.

For instance, when the right to award *recognised qualifications* that are equivalent in value to qualifications in the formal system, either complementing or supplementing them, is given to or taken over by other bodies, this entails a reduction in the representativeness of the established formal institutions: the Education Ministry, the Ministry of the Länder in Germany, whose sole monopoly in granting diplomas is challenged to a certain extent.

And this is what is happening now, with the addition of the European level: there is a twofold, conflicting contradictory movement: the upward relinquishing of sovereignty by the Member States and the downward relinquishing of responsibility by national States to the regions and other local authorities.

At each of those levels, then, the question arises – to differing degrees of abstraction – of how and who defines the benchmarks, the profiles on the basis of which we can take differential action, with differing content, with different parties (private, public or mixed).

The important thing is to define a common goal, a shared objective. But a characteristic of our times is the inability of the social partners and the political authorities, whether national, regional or local, to fulfil their obligations, their duties.

This is one of the most important points and we must, as a result, think about the structures that will help to tackle the question of the instrumental methods compatible with the changes to today's requirements in this process of validation of learning. What instruments, what methods do we need to modify or develop, starting with what already exists, if we are to support the development of the formulation of needs and benchmarks, so that they are not just plausible but legitimate as well? How can we contribute to the success of this learning validation process, both technically (professionally) and having regard to this body of more general and multiple requirements that relate to values, personality traits and social skills?

According to Jean-Michel Joubier (CGT), as regards the debate on the validation of learning, we should not lose sight of the type of target group more immediately concerned.

Today it is the people who are in a position of exclusion who would derive the greater benefit from the establishment of systems for the validation of experience-based learning (even more than the validation of vocational learning, which is more limited). This is the group of people who in practice have slipped through the net of the different types of certification that exist in both initial and continuing training in their countries.

Of course it is more than necessary to reflect on the validation of learning relating to everyone, every target group, and on recognition of their development or pathway as part of lifelong training. Even so, the political debate today centres on the question of what needs to be done to give the excluded, the citizens in severe hardship, a number of tools that will help them to 'get out of the mess'.

Validation is seen by Jean-Michel Joubier, then, as a threefold social challenge:

(a) an individual should be recognised for what he is and can do, he should be given the means of negotiating with a potential employer,

(b) members of the active population should be given the tools for true mobility, although we should harbour no illusions, realising that mobility is more often than not forced,

(c) last – but here least as well – the individual should be given the tools for easier admission to training, in particular by allowing him not to have to retrain in skills that he already possesses – and this has monetary implications.

Jean-Michel Joubier sees it as primarily a social challenge, but one that has very practical economic consequences. If validation leads to a recognised certificate that employers regard as legitimate, it would enable them to have a far clearer policy on human resource management, both in terms of recruitment and within the workplace itself.

It has political implications, then, because a clear certification policy implies the intervention of the social partners and a dialogue with recognition and guarantees.

Jens Bjørnåvold felt that national certifications are not enough: the prospects they offer are too narrow, and one perceives within enterprises the need to develop standards and evaluations based on the observation and comparison of what is happening outside each country's national borders.

The various projects at present are aimed at developing European standards, at creating the basis for a European evaluation. This very important trend challenges our traditional concepts of qualifications, as well as our ways of thinking about the evaluation of non-formal skills.

Maria Engracia Cardim was concerned about the lack of precision in the terms used in the discussion. The concept of certification is totally different from the concept of the validation of vocational learning, which in turn differs from the validation of life pathways.

Underlying each concept a particular objective emerges, and these objectives should not be confused:

(a) establishing occupational profiles,

(b) validating atypical vocational, life or mixed itineraries, etc.,

(c) facilitating job retraining,

(d) preventing redundancies and unemployment,

(e) helping to reintegrate the excluded.

The methods to be adopted in order to achieve these different objectives are themselves completely different. We cannot confine ourselves to discussing the general principles on which we are all agreed: legitimisation, coherence of the system, transparency, social cohesion, citizenship, etc.

Naturally we all agree as to the principles. But looking beyond the principles, there the concepts, objectives and practical objectives of people that are completely different:

(a) updating the profile of a person employed in an enterprise is one thing: it can be solved by skills audits or *assessment centres*; this is a recognised, established situation,

(b) retraining an employee whose job has been done away with – whether in the workplace or by means of an outside placement – is another thing,

(c) to place a proper value on the skills of a person following an atypical route characterised by lack of continuity and breaks is yet another thing,

(d) and finally, integrating the excluded, the true sociologically and socially excluded, is a totally different thing. Relying on '*assessment centres*' and proving the existence of skills are not enough. Such people must also be 'rehabilitated' by being given the social skills that might spark off a will to integrate.

What we have before us is a kaleidoscope. Exclusion is not a single-faceted problem.

12.3.3. Social partners' round-table discussion: the validation of learning. What can we build together?

Juan María Menéndez-Valdés – Spanish employers' Confederation

Undeniably we live in a complex society in which the forms of learning are not confined to the classic function of the schools, whereas the traditional mechanisms are limited to the recognition and accreditation of learning conducted according to the most academic and formal of procedures.

The creation of mechanisms that can be used to detect and assess non-formal learning, then, is of undoubted interest and value. The questions that then arise are about who is to define those mechanisms.

Juan María Menéndez-Valdés replied to the question by making a distinction between three levels: the social level, the level of the enterprise and the level of the individual.

(a) At the social level, it is evident that, in our environment, the public-sector departments have almost a form of monopoly over the laying down of rules relating to standard job profiles.

Logically, then, it should be the responsibility of the authorities to decide on innovations in the recognition and validation of skills acquired by non-formal means, and validation and accreditation of non-formal skills should be conducted by relation to the national reference system. The validation and certification of isolated skills would make no sense unless they are part of a modular system, so that they are steps that will eventually lead to a standard qualification.

Spain has recently set up a Qualifications Institute, whose terms of reference are to draw up a national qualifications system to serve as a common reference for the country's three vocational training sub-systems (initial, continuing and for the unemployed), with a view to integrating the accreditation of learning.

Although the accreditation of learning does not raise problems with a number of transferable technical skills, Juan María Menéndez-Valdés felt that it is not desirable or even possible to validate transferable skills associated with particular cognitive skills (planning, decision-making, problem-solving) or social skills (communication, teamwork). These skills are important, but a certificate claiming to confer official accreditation would not be credible.

(b) At the level of the enterprise, the concept of qualification takes the form of a profile of the skills required for an actual job. The constellations of skills required are very specific and are not taken into account in the national systems. Juan María Menéndez-Valdés did not think that public intervention is desirable at this level. It would serve no purpose and, at worst, would hamper the development of more leading-edge companies, those that go beyond the traditional reference framework.

It is for the employers, then, to take these skills into account through their internal system of human resource management and under collective bargaining when negotiating collective agreements.

(c) At the level of the individual, the concept of qualification refers to the full baggage of skills a person possesses. It can be expressed in a CV and covers:

(i) skills certified by reference to national standards,

(ii) skills documented by other means,

(iii) non-documentable skills, which will be assessed by the employer at the time of recruitment.

The validation of non-formal learning must facilitate the provision of evidence of the second type of competence.

As regards what we can build together, the important thing is to promote the structured linking of the measures that exist on the national scale, so that we can genuinely develop the mobility of human resources in a European market.

(a) For mobility of employment, it is essential that the certificates issued by national systems, including those that take account of prior learning, should be more transparent; the most realistic course of action today would seem to be that of supplements to certificates with a common format.

(b) For mobility in education and learning, specific account should be taken of the systems of validation of prior learning, to enable individuals to embark on formal studies in another Member State.

Hjørdis Dalsgaard – Danish Education Ministry

The education system that Denmark would like to have is a system offering training to all types of adults irrespective of their starting point. This implies a special concern for people with low levels of education, because they are the ones least likely to use the adult training system.

We would like to have a system in which people believe in lifelong training. But this implies that they should feel themselves capable of such training. They have to learn to learn, and this should be taught in the primary school. In other words, the issue affects the whole of the educational system.

Moreover it is the responsibility of the State, and therefore of the Education Ministry, to help individuals find their way through the system.

In Denmark, it might be thought that this already operates. One out of two Danes takes part in some way in a training measure, profitably or less profitably, and adults believe in lifelong

training, as shown by the surveys that we conduct. But we do not think that the system is working well enough as yet.

The interest shown in non-formal qualifications is a new example, one that has emerged from the trends on the labour market. The unemployment rate is considerably lower, and we need to integrate all adult workers in the labour market. We are even trying to persuade them to delay their retirement.

In 1993 we started to set up the recognition of non-formal qualifications as part of vocational training for adults (over 25). The adults train, especially as part of apprenticeship arrangements, on the same terms as younger people, but they may be exempted from some of the programme depending on what they have already learned.

Moreover we have set up a system of certification for adults, accessible through part-time continuing training. This certification is on four levels:

(a) basic training,

(b) post-school adult training,

(c) diploma,

(d) master's degree.

Theoretically it takes six years to obtain a master's degree. But the basic idea in fact is to combine work experience, elements from 'popular education' – *folkeoplysning* or 'enlightenment of life' – etc., with each individual mapping his own learning itinerary in the light of what he has already acquired. For us, the concern is that the system should be both:

(a) a means of making it clear what skills are available in the economy;

(b) a system that matches the demands and needs of each adult.

Nikolaus Bley – DGB Nordrhein-Westfalen

In connection with our theme (how to adapt to the learning society into which we are settling), there is a basic debate, the debate on *the future of work*. In the learning society it is not enough to know, we have to work as well. And this is a question that calls for an urgent solution so that we can adapt our educational system, both initial (basic) and continuing (non-formal).

Faced with the transformations affecting us in every field, but especially in the organisation of work, what are the social partners doing? What can they do in common? Can they have common interests? As regards both formal and informal training, the central issue is one of interests. And interests diverge.

Of course employers have an interest in information on the workforces available to them. They have a great interest in discerning the pool of knowledge on which they can draw and which is nowhere to be found in the process of work as it is organised today.

On the other hand, employers have no interest in this knowledge being certified, as this will spark off claims for higher pay.

Employees, on the other hand, have opposing interests. The appraisal, validation and certification of knowledge acquired by non-formal means reinforce their position on the market. They have something in their hands going beyond their immediate person, something that enables them to offer a clear picture of their qualifications.

In a constantly changing world, where the downgrading of qualifications at any moment is a threat to every working person, the certification of informal and non-formal learning is a social policy measure. This should be clearly stated. It is a public intervention measure that helps to secure employees' positions when faced with radical market changes. It is for this reason that we, the unions, feel that it is only right and fair.

Besides this, it is still seen as an essential function of certification and of the process whereby it is obtained to kindle a taste for learning among individuals, to offer encouragement for learning by restoring people's confidence in themselves and to enable them to acquire modules, value units or credits. Regarding this aspect, stimulating the desire to train, the State and the employers are far from being the only parties concerned: it is in particular the role of the union confederations.

However that may be, it is very important that the initial training system, the school, should be able to prepare people for a situation in which they will need to train; the school must give them the ability to benefit from continuing training. This means that the ability to learn must be instilled very early on.

But this of course is not enough. There is also a need to set up the tools and procedures that will make lifelong training possible, such as opportunities to take training leave.

For us in Germany, things are not easy because the German system is very rigid. Germany is a large country in which the Länder are responsible for training policy, and it is very hard to introduce and disseminate new ideas there, and all the harder since the theme is more complex.

On the union side, we are of course trying to do something, but the general atmosphere is unpropitious for continuing training. It is unlikely that we can rely on State support. The potential beneficiaries of training are themselves hard to mobilise, and the employers are strongly opposed to it.

Lastly, if we are asking ourselves 'what can we do together at the European level?', how can we believe in the effectiveness of initiatives handed down from the top, such as the smart card project? We need to be far more pragmatic and, in particular, to build on the developments that are common to several countries, so that they can be moved forward in a direction that will be in the common interest.

12.3.4. General discussion

In introducing the general discussion, Eric Fries Guggenheim summarised his impressions of the Agora up to this point. He sensed the shared resolve to promote the acquisition of learning, but he also clearly felt that the reasons why we want to develop the assessment and recognition of learning still vary a good deal from one partner to the other: employers, employees and political decision-makers. What we have in common is visibly an undeniable interest in the validation of learning, but it is never on the same points that we are agreed. This shows the relevance of the question: how can we build something together?

For Niels Jørgen Nordbøge, there is no simply reply to this question. Dialogue could be one response. Denmark, for instance, has a long tradition of tripartite negotiations. The social partners there are regarded as being naturally entitled to speak and have a say on the general nature of educational programmes.

Dialogue itself has repercussions on the method of funding the training. First of all, educational programmes come under the Education Ministry, whereas training for the labour market comes under the Labour Ministry, and the type of funding that flows to each of those systems is very different.

Next, looking forward to the next few years, in Denmark we are moving towards an increase in the financing of educational programmes by enterprises, and no doubt also towards a rise in the proportion chargeable to individuals. But all this is very obviously the outcome of a process negotiated on a tripartite basis.

Extending this discussion, Marian Nieskens wanted to ask the participants in Agora V again about the opposition between the hierarchical or top-down approach and the participatory or bottom-up approach.

As far as the Netherlands is concerned, in the course of research commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, it was noted that what matters is not so much the method used as the way in which the social partners are involved. This being so, the approach to the validation of learning in the Netherlands is clearly bottom-up and there is a risk of not reaching the full application of a principle which for the time being is merely in the experimental phase. But what is called a bottom-up or top-down approach? And, finally, why this question on the bottom-up or top-down approach? Is it an attempt to impose a common direction on the methodologies being implemented in Europe?

With Donal Kerr and the Portuguese colleagues also present at Agora V, CINOP had tried to gauge the value of a common European approach, whether bottom-up or top-down. What emerged is that it is not certain that having a common approach is in our interest. We shall find no special benefit in standardising the methods or criteria used, but it may be more realistic at this stage to try to achieve greater transparency in our learning evaluation procedures rather than looking for a standard approach.

Petri Haltia *(University of Turku)* agreed with Marian Nieskens that the distinction between the top-down and bottom-up approach is not as clearly defined and settled as might at first seem in some cases. The Finnish system does seem to be top-down, since it is the Education Ministry who has responsibility and takes the initiative. But the social partners are in practice involved from the start. Next, the standards demanded are in fact decided by the examining boards and those conducting valuations and organising the tests. But the social partners also come in at this level, since the evaluators are the professionals which means that the approach may also be bottom-up.

The experience of Portugal is also based on tripartism, as Eugenio Rosa pointed out. Its experience is long established, since the national tripartite certification commission was set up in 1991 and, in this commission, eight sector-specific sub-commissions have been set up since 1994.

The tangible results are not yet very visible perhaps as far as the validation of learning is concerned: there are two certificates – one in the sector of the training of trainers, the other for taxi drives – but these commissions were set over-ambitious objectives. Their aim was to arrive at the certification not only of skills obtained through work experience but also those obtained by the training, and this added to the difficulties of reaching consensus.

In the course of these tripartite discussions it was also found that the people appointed were not very available. All the commissions were made up of members having many other occupations and not generally having the appropriate information to discuss the profiles that were the base for such qualifications.

Having said this, in Portugal the certification of learning clearly passes through the tripartite commission, whose secretariat is provided by the Labour Ministry (not the Education Ministry, as is the case with other experiments presented during the Agora).

Burkart Sellin then returned to what he regarded as another central issue, i.e. the structure of training provision.

Everybody seemed to agree that adults are today being confronted with the need for training and that they are under an obligation to access continuing training and to train throughout their lives. There had been many discussions on his subject, and 1997 was the year of continuing training, in the course of which the need for lifelong training was highlighted. But therein lies a true paradox: while all the different political forces, the various social parties, etc., talk only of its development, in practice the structure of its provision lags far behind, falling well short of the needs.

The gigantic, highly profitable market for continuing growth has been allowed to spread anarchically. But only a certain number of solvent individuals or those whose training is paid by third parties have access to it.

On the other hand there are many people who do not have the resources to train and whose training is not paid for by anyone. The mass of excluded people is constantly expanding, there is growing polarisation and the process of exclusion is not corrected, as it should be, by continuing training.

It is not just school-leavers who are affected, but adults in general. Public-sector regulations, collective agreements, the market itself are totally unsatisfactory, as they are incapable of allowing individuals truly to realise their projects.

The structure of training provision should therefore be improved, and a corrective should be found for this particularly anarchic market. Unfortunately, the only ones who have an interest in overcoming this paradox, workers' organisations, citizens' associations or the local authorities, are not in a position to do so or of going beyond injunctions and 'all that is needed is to . . .'.

But 40% to 50% of the population cannot be debarred from any access to continuing training. This is the more general theme which is the background to the Agora: the need not only for the validation of learning, but also for the creation of entirely new forms of certification and qualification. Supporting the process of creating the learning society is not enough; it must be taken in hand and influenced in such a way that it is not always the object but also a participant in its shaping.

Nicolas Bley pointed out that in his own country, as he had already said during the round-table discussion, there is severe cultural conflict between the social partners. The culture of tripartism inherent in Denmark, the Netherlands, even in Portugal, does not exist in Germany. The watchword there is social consensus, and this is regarded as sufficient. It may, however, be counter-productive, for there are certainly situations where everyone is the winner (win/win situations). If in an enterprise, to take a Dutch example, described by Ruud Klarus outside the Agora, it is decided that the whole staff is to be assessed, in other words that all those who work there are to produce their own portfolios, the win/win situation lies in the following factors:

(a) the employees obtain their certifications, which are also valid outside the enterprise, and this is very important because if for example it shuts down they can start again elsewhere;

(b) the enterprise, for its part, knows the potential at its disposal, the qualifications it had quite simply never thought about and which opens up opportunities for development;

(c) lastly, at the social level, this win/win solution is profitable, since in benefiting each individual it is of benefit to society. For example, in the context of globalisation, it puts the national economy at a competitive advantage compared with the rest of the world.

Riel Miller, for his part, hoped that the debate could be shifted to a slightly different level, that it would be more forward-looking. Too often we find ourselves engaging in rearguard debates. If the industrial workers of today are to become the workers of tomorrow's learning society it will be through more school education and training and more technical knowledge that they

will succeed in doing so. Workers need more qualitative ability to define objectives, to make choices, to motivate themselves and to network.

Much of our discussion, in this Agora and elsewhere, boils down to trying to see how they can obtain a sign, a badge, a certificate, that will enable them to achieve higher pay, adhering closer to the existing system of education and employment. Riel Miller had nothing against earning more and finding it easier to become employed, but we should also try to think about an alternative system that will serve to prepare for the future.

Jean-Michel Joubier declared that he was struck by the difficulty in our debate in looking beyond the sphere of education. Everything brings us back to formal education, to the training bodies, etc. The question, however, is *'is the validation of non-formal learning of interest?'*, which then leads to the question of *'what is being validated?'*. If we have agreed to take part in this Agora, however, it is because we think that the activity of work is formative and that it gives knowledge to people who have not taken a given training course, and that knowledge can be validated.

He saw the validation of vocational learning as a means of questioning, of stimulating change in and of evolving the received concepts of *education* in our several countries. Above all, then, we should not fall into line with those received concepts.

As regards the question of mobility now being raised at the level of the European Union, moreover, there is a clear need for a minimum of common benchmarks, not just data that each person dips into to find what he wants to find. We do need a minimum of convergence, which raises the issue of benchmarks and certification and especially of determining how learning is certified and who is doing the certifying.

How are we to make coherent, convergent advances? The aim is not a standardised system, that would be impossible – we all have too different a mentality and reality – but at least we should be able to listen to and discuss with each other. In the end the debate is unsatisfactory as it is going off in all directions whereas it should refocus on the question of validation.

Following on what was said by Jean-Michel Joubier, Anne-Marie Charraud expressed surprise at the weight (not to say pollution) of training in our discussions on validation.

We are all acting very broadly as if only training people were capable of validating learning. But when it comes to defining the common rules of use of certification, the legibility of workers in the national context, we realise that the social partners can very well be taken into account and should be so. In parallel, we recognise the enormous difficulties in envisaging common rules at European level, since they are bound up with totally integrated standards, cultural history and specific society contexts.

In fact as the consumers of certification, we must be very clear on the provision of certification, more so than on the provision of training. We are well aware during our discussions that we are faced with a certification market, and we perceive that this market has

very unequal elements: what is validated and transmitted in fact differs considerably depending on the provider of certification:

(a) the certification offered by trainers (is it necessary to validate everything that is transmitted in training?),

(b) negotiated certification constructed on the basis of benchmarks drawn up by the social partners (the procedures for the validation of informal learning should be evaluated),

(c) the whole provision of certification offered to us by private agencies, publishers, companies producing automated self-assessment and self-training.

For an individual, a consumer, it is very hard to distinguish what is important in all this provision.

In France, but elsewhere in Europe as well, in Denmark for example, we are obliged to consider guidance measures to explain to people, depending on what they are aiming at in terms of work and personal development, which is the best provider of certification. It is only subsequently that the question of the provider of training arises.

Concluding this lengthy session of general discussion, Jens Bjørnåvold tried to summarise what had been heard and learned during the course of this Agora. Agora V will have provided an overview of what is happening in Europe. The Agora will have confirmed that a new trend is emerging in Europe. Efforts are being made there to build a bridge between initial training, continuing training and non-formal training. The various introductory papers and the contributions from the representatives of individual countries have confirmed this:

(a) we have heard about a competence-based system operating on a wide scale in Finland,

(b) we have seen how, in Denmark, a system that creates a bridge between non-formal learning and training was being set up,

(c) in the Netherlands, we have discovered the importance of grassroots work in the process of the validation of learning,

(d) in France, the debate on partial exemption from elements in the training programmed based on the declarations of the individuals concerned with a view to continuing a process of qualifying training, as opposed to the certification of learning by third parties with a view to the open-ended recognition of the qualification, has proved particularly 'pregnant', with conflict between two lines of reasoning, two concepts of competence, two ministries, etc.,

(e) in Portugal, the importance of tripartite work on certifications is the striking factor, reflecting a resolve to create links between the different forms of apprenticeship,

(f) in Spain, the efforts to integrate what is still a very fragmented system of vocational training are very symbolic of the substantial efforts in Europe to build a bridge between the different domains of training and apprenticeship.

This is something new. It did not exist a few years ago, and evaluation is the central element in this change. It is something that has been very clearly demonstrated in Agora V.

Obviously, we also have the challenge set by Riel Miller. And perhaps we all have the feeling of being rather enclosed in this industrial way of thinking and of not being able to take account of the challenges of the 21st century opening up before us. But it is very hard to try to structure the evaluation of learning and, at the same time, to see how to create modes of evaluation that could allow for all those challenges.

The trend has been confirmed in this Agora. Riel Miller has pointed out the locus of the challenge. But the discussion about what the challenges are has not yet really taken place, and still needs to be conducted.

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This Agora allowed us to advance the notion of recognising learning. One of its main conclusions is that we need to lift the processes and practices linked to the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning out of the usual school-based mould. Only then will these practices be able effectively to stimulate and promote general and vocational training at any age, serving both individuals and society at large.

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